

SOCIAL UNDERMINING: A MODEL EXPANSION OF THE EMPLOYEES' SOCIAL UNDERMINING AND DETERMINING ITS RELATIONSHIP WITH ORGANIZATIONAL AGILITY

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Abstract: Social undermining is a negative achievement of social life that imposes huge costs on organizations and societies. Undermining behaviors leave negative effects and consequences on organizations and people. In this study, the causal, background, and intervening causes along with the consequences of social undermining are discussed by building on grounded theory. This study is conducted to attenuate the negative effects of social undermining on staffs so as to contribute the managers and policy makers of the State Welfare Organization of Iran. In fact, the contribution of this research is to compute the elements of social undermining model in organizations. The results of the study reveal that there is a positive relationship between the direct undermining, Physical Undermining, Verbal Undermining, Nonverbal undermining and social undermining. Further, a positive and direct relationship exists between the aspects of social undermining and organizational agility.

Keywords: Social undermining, Physical Undermining, Verbal undermining, Nonverbal undermining, Organizational Agility, Welfare Organization.

1. INTRODUCTION

Employee Today, organizations have human capitals with different tempers and cultures. But focusing on organizational culture and understanding human behaviors, they can offer suitable strategies to prevent behaviors that result in a reduction in organizational productivity. Stressing on organizational and managerial knowledge not only makes modern organization stay behind the competition for making progress, but also allows them to have a strategy to fight behavioral and psychological challenges in the organization. Scholars, concerned with organizations and engaged in the field of labor power productivity, have turned unsurpassed attention to the dark angels of organizational life i.e. the negative aspects of social interactions and the details of intimate interpersonal relationships.

One of the negative achievements of social life which imposes huge costs on the organizations and societies is social undermining. Undermining behaviors leave negative effects and consequences on organizations and people. Undermining behaviors, for example, result in lower job satisfaction and higher destructive work behaviors. These behaviors can have active and passive aspects. The active aspect includes expressing disrespectful things about an individual and the passive aspect includes hiding significant information from an individual in the workplace that typically is behaviors that are manifested in an effort to disdain an individual.

2. THEORY AND HYPOTHESES

2.1. Social undermining and Organizational Agility

The concept of social undermining was first raised by Vinokur and Renrin. However, Rook (1984) was the first among contemporary theoreticians that has actively drawn the attention of many researchers toward the problematic aspects of social bonds. Vinokur and Renrin (1993) have defined social undermining as negative feelings and emotions such as anger and dislike directed at a target. Likewise, negative evaluation of the person in terms of his/her attributes, actions, efforts, and behaviors that hinder them to attain from instrumental goals (Duffy et al., 2012). Problematic or conflictual interactions are actions by members of social networks that cause their targets to experience distress and to develop initial reservations about their relationships with other actors (Yoo, 2013).

Rook called these actions as social negative communications, social problematic bonds, and social

negative interactions that result in social undermining. Further, negative evaluations of attitudes, actions, and efforts of the person and other deliberate behaviors on behalf of the supervisor and co-workers that disrupt his/her capabilities to reach his/her occupational goals, intentional reactive behaviors such as withholding important and required information to the undermined person and proactive behaviors such as insult, annoying facial movements, gossip and spreading rumors frequently about a particular person are regarded as undermining (Castille, 2017).

The studies of social undermining are based on Rook's social-psychological studies on the quantity of problematic social exchanges in an individual's experience (Hepburn and Enns, 2013). Rook studied the negative aspects of social interactions, the effects of psychological well-being, positive and negative consequences of social communications on the health condition of elderly widows. The results revealed that negative social interactions have more potent effects on women's well-being than positive interactions (Duffy et al. 2006).

It is worth mentioning that the initial studies have been more concerned with the positive aspects of social interactions and its benefits i.e. social support and then the negative construct i.e. social undermining is proposed - its core was negative effects of social undermining on physical health and mental well-being (Scott et al., 2015). An overview of trends in the above mentioned studies shows that the topic of social undermining was firstly formed in the domain of general psychology and then entered organizational studies. Duffy et al (2012) explain that three issues make undermining behaviors distinct from other mistreatment forms: it can only be considered social undermining if the target of these behaviors perceives it to be social undermining regardless of the intent of the actor. Undermining behaviors (weakening) have no immediate damage and harm, but grow more detrimental over time. Undermining behaviors have to be perceived by the perpetrator or the victim. Reynolds (2009) argues that social undermining falls into the following components:

A- Direct undermining actions: excoriate, outright reject, contemplating a person or their ideas, failing to defend someone when called upon, withholding information for business affairs- actions such as these can hamper relationships.

Hypothesis1: Direct undermining affected the social undermining.

B- Verbal undermining: character assassination, backbiting and making wrong remarks.

Hypothesis2: Verbal undermining affected the social undermining.

- C- Physical undermining: an attempt to harm a person in any possible way. The effort is utterly intentional and hinders the victim's ability to gain or maintain favorable reputation.

Hypothesis3: Physical undermining affected the social undermining.

- D- Nonverbal undermining: behaviors that undermine and humiliate a person.

Hypothesis4: Nonverbal undermining affected the social undermining.

Not only do employees who experience such social undermining behaviors exhibit negative health, attitudinal, and behavioral reactions, but also manifest stronger reactions to positive behaviors. Studies show that low levels of mistreatment such as undermining behaviors are more likely to occur compared with more intense forms of mistreatment constructs such as aggression (Pearson et al. 2001). Vinokur and Renrin (1993) define social undermining as negative feelings and emotions such as anger and dislike directed at a specific target or individual, negative evaluations of the target's attributes, efforts, actions, and other behaviors designed in order to hinder the target's ability to attain instrumental goals. Researchers have divided the outcomes of social undermining behaviors into three categories (Floger and Cropanzao, 1998):

Attitudinal outcomes such as weak occupational attitude that encompasses dissatisfaction, low commitment and distrust among people.

Health and well-being consequences, including psychological distress, tension, and depression (Steven, 2004).

Behavioral outcomes, including deviant behaviors such as aggression, sabotage, absenteeism, taking excessive breaks, intentionally putting little effort into work, and uncivil behaviors. These outcomes may result in abnormal interactions of staffs with people inside and outside the organization such as customers and family, emergence of occupational accidents, and consequently reduced individual and organizational productivity (Cleary, 2016).

2.2. Social Undermining and Social Support

Social support, despite social undermining, refers to positive behaviors and actions aimed at nurturing

positive interpersonal relationships (Williams, 2004). According to the definition of social undermining that refers to deliberate actions that reduce individuals' abilities to create and maintain positive relationships, lack or low level of social support is not equated with social undermining. Social support facilitates confrontation with severe and stressful conditions, while social undermining is a direct threat to effective coping. In the process of undermining, as an example, one may benefit from the compliment and admiration of his/her coworker so as to weaken his/her position in the organization and grab the attention of the supervisor. However, failure in complimenting and admiring a coworker due to distraction and fatigue are examples of supportive behaviors and are not considered as undermining behaviors (Scott et al., 2015). At first sight employees' undermining behaviors and antisocial behaviors are among negative workplace behaviors, but they are distinct based on action and goal. Anti-social behaviors are those that violate the organizations' expectations and norms and endanger an organization (Zaroban, 2006). Among these behaviors deviant behaviors and aggression can be mentioned that include a wide range of behaviors. While, social undermining is a restricted and accurate concept. Social undermining does not directly target an organization, rather target a certain person. In some cases, social undermining and workplace deviant behavior overlap. Reviewing the literature concerning workplace deviant behavior, several overlapping constructs are found including bullying (Rainier, 1997), violence and aggression (Newman and Baron, 1998), interpersonal conflicts (Spector and Jex, 1998), Indecency (Anderson and Pearson, 1999) and social undermining (Duffy et al., 2002). The most major difference between social undermining and other constructs lies in the way that social undermining can harm the relationships and success of its victims. Other mistreatment constructs do not specify the type of harm that people experience, but the outcomes and consequences of the undermining behaviors are clear. Social undermining is characterized as follows:

- The intent is clear on the part of the perpetrator (Ong et al., 2015).

-Social undermining implies an interference with relationships at work (Taylor et al., 2015).

- Social undermining has certain outcomes within its definition.

Therefore, social undermining has to interfere with social relationships, has to diminish the work-related success of victims, and has to hinder victims' reputations so as to be known as undermining behavior (Quade et al., 2013).

2.3. Organizational agility

Today's organizations are in urgent need of development and improvement of flexibility and organizational responsiveness (Teimouri and Izadpanah, 2015). Nowadays, many organizations and firms face a stable and unpredictable increasing competition as a result of technological innovations, changes in market environment and the changing needs of customers. This critical situation has caused major modifications in the organization's strategic vision, business priorities, review of traditional models and even contemporary models. Very few organizations can be found that have not witnessed a change in their environment for 3-6 months or one year. Given the circumstances that dominate the business world of organizations, organizations inevitably have to make some changes in attitudes, knowledge, approaches, processes, and expected results. The reason for inclination to dynamism is that the conditions that lead to organizations' agility might not be effective tomorrow. The reason for situational is that the market environment influences the level of required agility. The reason for volatility is that agility hinges on the organization's move to compatibility and adaptation. Finally, agility is growth oriented and will be materialized through the organization's capability to perceive and verify vision, reconstruct strategies, and making innovation in techniques and tactics (Dove, 2001).

In fact, agility is a fundamental ability that makes organizations feel, perceive, consider, analyze and predict changes in business environment. In line with this definition, an agile manufacturing has a broad perspective about new disciplines of the business world, face turbulences and turmoil with its few capabilities and capture the merits of change currents. Agile institutes and organizations are concerned with change, uncertainty, and unpredictability in their business environment. Thus, these institutes need a number of distinctive attributes to cope with change, uncertainty and unpredictability in the work environment. Such attributes include four main elements that are used as the basis for maintaining and developing agility:

- Responsiveness that refers to the ability to recognize changes and react fast and exploiting them.
- Competency that implies the capability to achieve organization's aims and objectives.
- Flexibility and adaptability which is the capability to trigger different processes and achieve different aims using the same facilities.

Speed which is the ability to do activities in the shortest time (Alhadid and Rumman, 2015).

Sharifi and Zhang (1999) define agility as an organization's ability to sense, perceive, and anticipate the extant changes in the business environment. Such an organization should detect environmental changes and take advantage of changes as opportunities of growth and prosperity. In another work, they have described agility as the competency to overcome sudden challenges to face unprecedented workplace threats and exploit changes as growth and progress opportunities. Agility depicts an organization dynamic, situational, volatile, and growth oriented. The reason for the willingness to dynamism is that the conditions that lead to organizational agility today might not be helpful and effective tomorrow.

The reason for Situational is that the market environment affects the required level of agility. Change and uncertainty stem from the fact that agility is contingent upon the organization's move toward compatibility and adaptation. Eventually, agility is growth oriented and will be materialized through the organization's capability to perceive and verify vision, reconstruct strategies, and drive innovation in techniques and tactics (Dove, 2001).

Hypothesis 5: Social undermining affected the organizational agility.

2.4. Research conceptual model

According to the discussions on social undermining and organizational agility, the research conceptual model on which the hypotheses are formed as follows :(Figure 1)

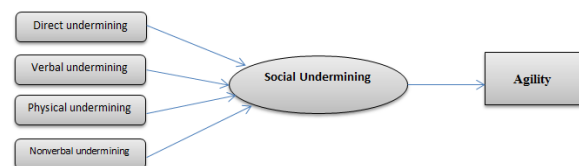


Figure 1. Conceptual Model.

3. METHOD

We tested our hypotheses with data from employees working in State Welfare Organization of Iran. The first step is a deep semi-structured interview with employees and experts of the organization, stratified purposeful sampling that its aim is employed to describe and compare subgroups. Snowball sampling is applied, a non-probability sampling technique and its focus is on

generating theory. Thus, data is collected firstly through initial interview, semi-structured interviews, and checklists. 184 staffs of the State Welfare Organization of Iran had an in-depth interview regarding social undermining in the form of open-ended questions for 30-80 minutes. Occasionally, the interviews were repeated for sharing of initial findings, completion, edition, and modification. The participants in the study were regarded as the most informed members of the organization's events, the most active and decisive people in the emergence of organization's critical events that their presence in the organization was often evident for all staffs in the organization. The statistical population of the research included all the specialists and professors of university and experts and managers of the State Welfare Organization of Iran. In the first step of qualitative sampling, the opinions of the organization's experts and specialists as well as university professors were obtained through interviews and observations. In the second step, questionnaire was developed to collect quantitative data. The statistical population of the study consisted of 184 experts and managers. To gather data we used social undermining questionnaire of Duffy (2006) and of Sharifi and Zhang standard questionnaire of organizational agility (2000). To estimate the questionnaire reliability, Cronbach's alpha method was used; alpha was 85% for agility questionnaire and 78% for social undermining questionnaire that shows the plausible reliability of the questionnaire. Using descriptive statistics, we studied the demographic questions and analyzed data based on statistical tests such as Pearson's correlation coefficient applying SPSS18 and Amos18.

4. RESULTS

Table 1 provides the means, standard deviations, reliabilities and bivariate correlations among the study variables at social undermining and organizational agility and the aspects of social undermining. As this table indicates, employee voice was significantly correlated. The results of Pearson's correlation analysis between social undermining and organizational agility showed that a positive and direct relationship exists between social undermining and organizational agility. Cronbach's alpha coefficients of the research variables were calculated and shown in table 2.

Table 1. Mean, Standard Deviation and Bivariate correlation among study variables.

Variable	Mean	SD	Social undermining	Agility
Age	33.04	9.29		
Gender	0.77	0.42		
Education(year)	14.13	2.73		
Tenure in current post(year)	3.99	4.18		
Direct undermining	3.37	4.61	0.48*	0.85**
Verbal undermining	4.06	0.55	0.86*	0.17*
Physical undermining	2.0	0.67	0.15**	0.12*
Nonverbal undermining	3.68	0.54	0.57*	0.61**

Note: N = 184

* p < .05

**p < .01

Table 2. Cronbach's Alpha Components Research

Component	Cronbach's alpha
social undermining	0.85
Social undermining components	
individual factors	0.79
group factors	0.76
environmental factors	0.68
Organizational factors	0.73

Table 3 examined the plausibility of structural equation modelling (SEM). The first index is (df/X2), if this index is between 1 and 3, it indicates higher confirmation of the model. This value is 1.64 in this study.

Table 3: Results for Structural model nested comparisons and invariance between path weights

X2/df	GFI	IFI	NFI	CFI	RMSEA
1.64	0.88	0.92	0.85	0.94	0.068

The second index is RMSEA, the closer it is to 0.05, and the more efficient the model is. This index is equal to 0.068 in this study. Four other indices are GFI, IFI, NFI, and CFI that range between 0 and 1- the closer to one they are, the more efficient would be the model. These indices are respectively 0.88, 0.92, 0.85, and 0.94.

According to the SEM, the hypotheses are significant, the effect of physical undermining on organizational agility as the first hypothesis, the effect of verbal undermining on organizational agility as the second hypothesis, the effect of direct undermining on organizational agility as the third hypothesis, the effect of nonverbal undermining on organizational agility as the fourth hypothesis (Table 4).

Table 4. Result of hypothesized relationships

Hypothesized Relationships	Standardized Estimates	t- Value	Std Error	Conclusion
Direct undermining → Social Undermining.	0.75	14.85	0.08	H ₁ Supported
Verbal undermining → Social Undermining.	0.64	12.18	0.05	H ₂ Supported
Physical undermining → Social Undermining.	0.69	14.10	0.05	H ₃ Supported
Nonverbal undermining → Social Undermining.	0.72	13.19	0.07	H ₄ Supported
Social Undermining. → agility.	0.67	14.18	0.05	H ₅ Supported

5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Regarding the causes and factors of undermining behaviors, as said above, for the emergence of these behaviors countless reasons can be assumed and a realistic view of this issue implies the individual's incapability and incompetence in managing and controlling different situations and having constructive competition with others. Due to the lack of essential qualifications, the individual seeks to degrade the position and status of other people so that h/she can have the opportunity to promote and progress (Hershcovis, 2011).

Researchers believe that as the economic conditions get worse, immoral behaviors get intense as well. Thus, it is more evident in countries encountered with the economic crisis. Studies reveal people with lower responsibilities are engaged in nearly all immoral behaviors, particularly social undermining. Since obtaining an organizational rank in most cases is consistent with people's capability growth, it can be concluded that people with more important capabilities and responsibilities suffer less from this phenomenon. The research findings confirm this issue. According to the phenomenon of cognitive dissonance, the individuals' behaviors are different from their attitudes and sometimes these behaviors can change in a way that can act in different ways about a fact. This fact might be an attitudinal topic in the processes of interpersonal relationships. Thus, it is always likely that we witness people having conflicting behaviors. People

in their interpersonal relationships intentionally engage in manipulative behavior at times.

Manipulation can take different forms, among which is the manifestation of undermining behaviors. Manipulative behaviors occur in communications and behaviors that the individuals feel weak at. These behaviors are associated with interpersonal relationships in that such behaviors are accomplished in relationship with others. The phenomenon under investigation in this study includes all the directions of interpersonal relationships, such as bottom-up, top-down and interactive relationships. However, it is largely associated with the social undermining of coworkers in the similar positions in the organizational hierarchy as well as supervisors. According to the perspectives of the research statistical population and samples, the codes (classifications) sub-divided into four classes: individual, group, environmental, and organizational components.

-Individual components: among the organization's employees, some do everything to achieve more power by any means. "Some people do whatever to gain power and get to the top, they ruin their friendship, compliment you to your face, but talk behind your back, make lies, dishonor someone etc. All these behaviors are for the sake of reaching a higher power and position", an interviewee said. Ambiguity in the role, conflicts in roles and aims, failure in fulfilling needs, job dissatisfaction, mental stress, tension and depression, absenteeism, taking long breaks, intentionally working slowly, reduction in individual productivity, anger and conflict, disinterest in the job, lack of manifestation of feelings at work, lack of occupational engagement.

-Group components: as all employees belong to a working group and groups are of high importance, the following components can play drastic roles in displaying undermining behaviors: apathy, interpersonal conflicts, interpersonal distrust, aggression and sabotage, no manifestation of organizational citizenship behaviors, lack of enthusiasm, group norms undermining, and lack of social identity.

-Organizational components: as the organization under investigation in this study is a state institution and typically the replacement of the head of state and managerial changes make changes in the organization's presidency domain that often undermining behaviors. The fact that the government committee belongs to what range impacts the shift of power and the role of these behaviors. Components such as: contempt, not defending one in the event of a critical situation, gossip, sarcasm, intentional hurt, discredit, character assassination, training and the clarity of

the job description, misunderstanding the organizational congruence, organizational bullying, low organizational commitment, low organizational productivity, inclination to turnover, and organizational culture.

-Environmental components: understanding today's organizational environment is paramount. Examining the internal and external environment of organizations contribute to the better perception of undermining behaviors in organizations. The most important environmental factors that cause undermining behaviors include: work-family conflict, the creation of a barrier to communication by the moral atmosphere, and occupational accidents.

The perpetrators of undermining behaviors have some personal and behavioral attributes that prepare a particular ground for the manifestation of these behaviors in the organization. These people are those who intentionally experience such organizational behaviors. An employee says, "Some are overly two-faced, social climber, and worldly that cannot see other people or cannot watch other people's success".

These people just think about their own advantages and greater power... they are not much bound to ethical principles and claim that work relationships should be separated from values. Another factor that encourages and persuades people toward undermining behaviors is the "operant conditioning" of such behaviors in the organizations. In line with the definition of Skinner's operant conditioning, people's behaviors are subject to the nature of the consequences. Consequently, when people experience such behaviors and not only are hindered by other members of organizations, but also are rewarded occasionally, these behaviors become more tempting and learn to exhibit these behaviors in order to grow and promote. Therefore, when no one impedes such behaviors and managers show willingness to such behaviors, others find that if they want to get higher benefits, they can follow them and no one stands against them.

Other people assert that injustice perceptions, emphasizing distributional and procedural injustice, are antecedents of the manifestation of such behaviors. Distributional justice means the perception of a person as to the allocation of resource, benefits and advantages. Procedural Justice refers to the perception of a person as regards the fairness of current procedures in decision making to compensate the employees' services in organizations. Employees with higher job tenure think

they deserve more in comparison to the new employees. Provided that people who have just joined the organization are appointed to critical positions, they would be more blamed for undermining behaviors.

"Some snitches get what they want and rule the organization by such behaviors and backbiting to the managers", an employee says. When others see that such people have a special status to the manager, they also get to work. Indeed, these people acquire these behaviors through social learning. Social learning is the process of learning through observable experiences. When these people see that others gain power and benefits in the organization by undermining behaviors and no obstacle is in their way, they learn by experience that they can reduce the degree of injustice by social undermining and earn a greater share of organizational benefits. All the organization's members who are inclined to domineer and have countless weaknesses experience these behaviors.

The manifestation of comparison and equality behaviors with others is inevitably evident in human's behavior to a greater extent. But, having a healthy and constructive competitive atmosphere and devising structures and relationships which prepare the least field for discrediting and bias can proceed in a way that people compare themselves with before and their prior performances and have measures to evaluate the degree of change and achieving success. In brief, the findings of this research will be applicable to the following cases:

Contributing organizations' managers to detect the effective factors in the manifestation of undermining behaviors with better understanding and prevention of such behaviors.

Managers will have a better understanding of social undermining behavior.

Contributing other organizations to realize which of the employees' behaviors are close to this behavior.

It is a guide to organizations' policymakers to take an accurate policy for controlling these behaviors.

Contributing the managers and researchers to have a better perception toward social undermining behavior and its predictors and consequences with other behaviors.

6. PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

According to the research theoretical foundations and the

results of data analysis, it is suggested that the organizations' training and development unit hold an educational course in line with the employees' needs. Further, the public relations division of the organizations can post messages on behavioral issues and undermining behaviors through ironic messages on notice boards and draw attention to this topic at the organizational level and its consequences. Finally, some sessions with the presence of employees on the organization's expectations and problems have to be held and assure people that their concerns are paid attention.

6.1. Limitations and directions for future research

Finally, it has to be mentioned that the output of a qualitative research should shed light on the future qualitative and quantitative pieces of research. Thus, according to some of the important and new results of the present study, it is recommended that future researchers conduct investigation in the fields below:

- Studying the emergence of undermining behaviors in the staffs of other organizations
- Studying the effect of undermining behaviors on staffs' occupational outcomes in other organizations
- Providing an effective framework for benchmarking in different fields of human resource

For further generalizability of the results, it is suggested that the approaches undertaken in this study be addressed in other organizations and institutes so that a better perception is accomplished as to the effect of these factors.

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