

TOWARD A COMPREHENSIVE MODEL OF THE EMPLOYEE ADAPTATION DECISION PROCESS

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ABSTRACT

In this paper we propose a model of how employees respond both to job dissatisfaction and to negative work emotions. Job dissatisfaction prompts a decision process that results in one of five behavioral responses intended to help the employee reduce dissatisfaction: Problem-Solving, Planned Exit, Avoidance, Equity-enhancing Retaliation or Capitulation. Negative emotions produce more impulsive forms of Exit, Avoidance and Retaliation that may or may not be adaptive. Each process is moderated by both situational (e.g., labor market conditions, group norms) and individual difference (e.g., perceived control, emotional reserve/control) variables.

Organizational researchers have long been interested in how employees respond to dissatisfaction with work and life. More than a thousand studies have explored the relationship between job satisfaction and turnover (Rosse, 1991); probably half again that number have investigated the association between job satisfaction and other withdrawal behaviors, such as absence, lateness, goldbricking, and reduced productivity. As a result of this research activity, there is now substantial agreement that job satisfaction is generally, though weakly, negatively related to behaviors that represent withdrawal from, or avoidance of, unpleasant work conditions. Correlations have generally been strongest with voluntary turnover (or even more so, turnover intentions), followed by volitional absenteeism. The

smaller body of evidence regarding job satisfaction-lateness relations suggests a more tentative relationship may also exist with this form of job withdrawal (Blau, 1994). Some evidence also suggests that there may be a "progression of withdrawal" beginning with lateness and culminating with resignation from the job (Gupta & Jenkins, 1982; Rosse, 1988).

A step forward in this line of research took place in the last fifteen or so years, as researchers have compiled increasing evidence that behaviors such as these are better understood when considered as manifestations of broad underlying behavioral families. For example, Hanisch and her colleagues (Hanisch & Hulin, 1990, 1991; Hanisch, Hulin, & Roznowski, 1998) have shown that behaviors such as being late or

absent, quitting, thinking about retirement, and reducing work effort fit into two broader families of job withdrawal and work withdrawal. According to this view, *job withdrawal* includes a group of behaviors intended to remove the worker completely from both the organization and the job; examples include quitting or deciding to retire. *Work withdrawal*, on the other hand, comprises behaviors intended to provide more temporary escape from work—such as arriving late or leaving work early, or being absent—or to minimize time spent on task—such as by goofing off while at work, or engaging in escapist drinking/substance abuse.

Other researchers have taken a similar “behavioral family” approach to studying other kinds of behaviors. One well-known school of thought has focused on prosocial or organizational citizenship behaviors—discretionary behaviors that in the aggregate are believed to benefit the organization or individuals and groups within the organization (Organ & Ryan, 1995). A similar approach can be seen in studies of organizational deviance/aggression, in which the focus has shifted from isolated highly visible events to patterns of more subtle—but serious in the aggregate—behaviors (Hollinger & Clark, 1982; Robinson & Bennett, 1995; Skarlicki & Folger, 1997). In each case, researchers have shown that viewing isolated behaviors as surface indicators of an underlying construct increases both predictive power and theoretical understanding (Hulin, 1991). These findings are wholly consistent with a half-century of theory and research showing that broadband attitudinal measures (such as job satisfaction) are much more predictive of equally broadband measures of behavior,

compared to narrow measures of isolated behaviors (Doob, 1947; Rushton, Brainerd, & Pressley, 1983).

Once we understand that many employee behaviors are better represented as exemplars of latent constructs such as withdrawal, prosocial behavior, or aggression, the next logical step is to determine how these behavior families are related to one another and to antecedents. Rosse and Miller (1984) formulated a basic model of employee adaptation that proposed that multiple behavioral families (behavioral withdrawal, psychological withdrawal, voice/attempts at constructive change, and retaliation) are all related to employees’ dissatisfaction with work. From this perspective, the behavior families represent different strategies for adapting to, or coping with, dissatisfaction. Rosse and Hulin (1985) found some support for the model, including the finding that dissatisfied employees who did not choose an adaptive response experienced more physical and mental health symptoms than those who successfully adapted.

Interestingly, somewhat parallel findings have also emerged in studies of other behavior families. Enactment of prosocial/organizational citizenship behaviors has consistently been linked with employees’ perceptions of job satisfaction and organizational justice (Organ & Ryan, 1995). Although fewer studies exist for this domain, similar results appear to manifest for workplace and organizational deviance/aggression (Glomb, 1999; Skarlicki & Folger, 1997).

Recently, however, some significant criticisms have been directed towards behavioral family models of withdrawal/adaptation. Blau (1998) has suggested that job and work withdrawal

are overly simplistic categories of behavior, and should probably be regarded as more richly multidimensional. He cites work on violence/aggression as one example of a set of behaviors that should be incorporated into a comprehensive model of satisfaction-driven behavior. At the same time, important distinctions within behaviors (such as between excused and unexcused absences, avoidable or unavoidable turnover, or among different categories of lateness—such as “increasing chronic”, “periodic stable”, and “involuntary”—are not provided. While Blau appears not to be opposed to some aggregation of related behaviors, he argues that our theoretical understanding is impaired by the use of only two, extremely heterogeneous behavioral categories.

Other criticisms have focused on the role of job satisfaction as a central driving mechanism of adaptive/withdrawal behavior. One argument is that many of the behaviors we are discussing may have multiple possible causes. People may quit, for example, not because they dislike their current job but because they need to relocate (possibly due to a spouse’s job change, or to be closer to family). Similarly, people are often absent due to illness or injury, and being late may be the result of traffic, weather, or other conditions not under the control of the employee. On the other hand, relocation decisions are arguably affected at least in part by job satisfaction; for example, it may be much easier to decide to move for a spouse’s career if you don’t like your current job. Although we are not aware of any research that has assessed this hypothesis, there is research that shows that satisfied employees are more likely to attend work despite environmental constraints (a major

blizzard) that provided an excellent excuse not to come to work (Smith, 1977). Most of us are similarly familiar with dedicated employees who will come to work despite being sick, and others who use any minor ailment as an excuse not to do so. Nevertheless, it seems only reasonable to presume that reactions to the job should explain only a portion of employee withdrawal behavior.

Another criticism of job satisfaction as a causal mechanism in withdrawal behavior models is that job satisfaction (and related constructs such as organizational commitment or justice evaluations) is only one component of how employees react to the workplace. Weiss and Cropanzano’s Affective Events Theory suggests that job satisfaction should be thought of as a *cognitive* (rather than affective) evaluation of workplace conditions (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996). Because it involves a cognitive appraisal, it is more likely to lead to purposive adaptive behaviors, such as deciding to change employers or careers. They contrast this cognitive appraisal process with a more purely affective or emotional response process that is more likely to produce less thought-out reactions, such as impulsively quitting, or punching out a supervisor. Pelled and Xin (1999) have provided empirical support for this proposition in showing that negative moods (low positive affect) are more strongly related to absenteeism than to turnover.

A third concern with withdrawal/adaptation families has centered on their predictive performance. While this has been a long-standing question, Blau (1998) has provided the most recent criticism of predictive utility. He first argues that

studies have been inconsistent in showing any statistically significant relations between job satisfaction and either job or work withdrawal. He also argues that even when significant associations are found, their magnitude has been modest and rarely exceeds the strongest single-behavior correlations. On the other hand, both Fisher and Locke (1991) and Hanisch and her associates (Hanisch et al., 1998) have reviewed evidence to the contrary. Even if one were persuaded by Blau's argument that the predictive power of work and job withdrawal composites is less than it should be, we do not agree with his conclusion that the solution is to move away from behavior family approaches and toward prediction of more discrete behaviors.

Developing finer-grained understanding of particular behaviors—such as absenteeism, lateness, or quitting—has value if our primary purpose is to predict these particular behaviors. This approach is rooted in a managerial approach to predicting and then controlling “problem behaviors,” but it has serious limitations for both theory development and management practice. Most fundamentally, it makes sense only if the behaviors are independent of one another. If they are not—and there is reasonable evidence to suggest they are not—treating them in isolation creates two major problems, even from a practice perspective.

The first problem is that it is inefficient to develop separate theories (or control mechanisms) if the behaviors share—at least to some extent—common causes. Only after addressing the common sources of variance does it make sense to go further to explore the marginal utility of unique variance.

Second, from a very practical perspective, “treating” one behavior symptomatically (e.g., an absence control system or a retention program) may result in symptom substitution. The computer programmer who is thinking about quitting his current boring work assignment to move to cutting-edge firm may decide to stay when offered a substantial retention bonus. But if the boring nature of her work is not changed, she may decide to take the occasional day off (figuring that the employer who just engaged in a bidding war for her services isn't likely to then crack down on some absenteeism), or to engage in some more intellectually-stimulating hacking, or to take the next offer from a firm willing to pay more.

Despite these arguments for studying behavioral families—none of which are new—we must acknowledge the criticisms of this approach. Empirical associations between job satisfaction and behavior families have not been as strong or consistent as theory would predict. Although one good reason for this involves statistical artifacts involved with studying behaviors that are hard to measure and that have a low base rate and highly skewed distribution (Hulin, 1991), this does not provide an adequate explanation. We believe that a more fundamental solution involves integrating these behavior families into a more comprehensive model of the underlying process(es). The remainder of this paper represents our attempt to develop such a model.

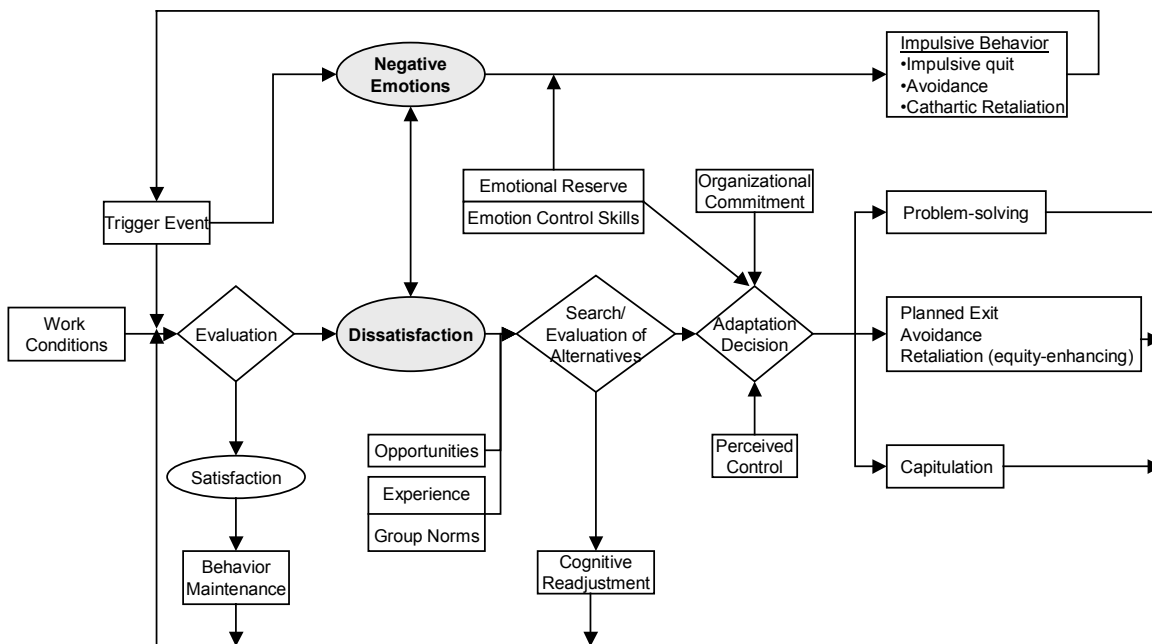
A Model of Employee Adaptation and Withdrawal

The model we are proposing here is an extension of the Adaptation model described by us earlier (Rosse & Miller,

1984), and adapted by Rosse and Noel (Rosse & Noel, 1996). It shares with those earlier models the notion that much employee behavior is motivated by a desire to adapt to dissatisfying working conditions. (In a broader context, it seems equally appropriate to suggest that a similar process occurs in non-work contexts, although many of the specific variables would be somewhat different. Our focus is primarily directed towards explaining work behaviors that are not directly related to job performance.) The fundamental premise is that dissatisfaction is

inherently unpleasant, and therefore motivates disaffected employees to search for a means for reducing dissatisfaction. This search for an adaptive or coping response is one of the mechanisms driving various non-performance behaviors in the workplace. The other behavior catalyst, consistent with the suggestion offered by Weiss and Cropanzano (1996), is negative emotions. Each of these mechanisms is hypothesized to result in somewhat different forms of employee behavior (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Model of Adaptive Behaviors



Adaptive and Impulsive Behaviors

Because the purpose of the model is to predict certain kinds of behaviors, it is appropriate to begin our discussion of the model with a description of the

behavioral categories on the right side of the model. Based on a large body of theory and research described previously, the model is based on behavioral families or clusters. Following Blau's (1998) critique, we

propose additional behavioral categories beyond work and job withdrawal. Doing so requires some discussion of prior research exploring the dimensionality of adaptive/withdrawal behaviors.

Blau's criticism of the job and work withdrawal typology has solid roots in prior conceptual thinking about employee withdrawal, most of which have proposed more a more extensive set of behavioral categories. Some of the earliest discussion was provided by Beehr and Gupta (1978), who suggested that withdrawal behaviors could be distinguished as either behavioral or psychological withdrawal. Our own early work (Rosse, 1983; Rosse & Miller, 1984) added the categories of attempts to make constructive changes (also mentioned by Mowday, Porter and Steers, 1982), retaliatory behavior, and cognitive readjustment. Henne and Locke (1985) suggested a distinction between "action alternatives" (changes in job effort, persuasive protest, aggressive protest, and physical withdrawal) and "psychological alternatives" (changing perceptions of the job, changing ones values, changing reactions via defense mechanisms, and toleration). Farrell, building on Hirschman's political science theory (Hirschman, 1970) of how societies and organizations cope with decline, proposed the categories of Exit, Voice, Loyalty, and Neglect (Farrell, 1983).

To date, the empirical support for these multidimensional models has been less than overwhelming. Rosse and Hulin (1985) concluded that their data supported a more limited taxonomy of Avoidance and Attempts at Change. Using a much larger data set and a variety of factoring techniques, Roznowski, Rosse, and Miller (1992) also found a simple positive (Attempts at

Change)—negative (Withdrawal) behavior distinction (both of which were distinct from organizational citizenship behaviors). As already described, Hanisch and her colleagues have also used numerous samples, some relatively large, as the basis for their two-factor, job versus work withdrawal model. Using a multi-dimensional scaling approach, Farrell found support for his Exit/Voice/Loyalty/Neglect model, although subsequent factor analyses have not always provided support for all four factors, particularly the Neglect category (Withey & Cooper, 1989).

Our conclusion to these inconsistent findings is that factor analysis of behavior frequency data may not be the best approach to determining behavior families. Part of the reason is that behavior data are notoriously messy, due to social desirability biases (employees are often reluctant to report "deviant" behaviors, even on anonymous surveys), natural low base rates (for example, even habitual absentees usually show up more than they are absent and by definition you can usually only quit once from a particular organization), and very skewed distributions (for example, a small number of employees are generally responsible for the majority of absenteeism and, probably, other non-normative behavior). These artifacts make it very difficult to meet the statistical assumptions underlying factor analysis, or other correlational analyses.

Moreover, from a theoretical point of view, it is not evident that we should expect the behaviors to strongly co-vary. In some cases, engaging in one behavior places a physical limit on other behaviors. For example, being absent precludes one from being late, leaving early, or goofing off on the job (at least on the particular day one is absent);

quitting similarly precludes any subsequent work-related behavior. (Of course, it might be interesting to study behavior on the subsequent job, but that is precluded by typical research designs.) Even more fundamentally, compensatory models of behavior (such as the model we describe) assume that engaging in one successful form of adaptation should make it unnecessary to engage in others. Therefore, it is perfectly reasonable to find negative correlations among the behaviors described in the model, at least when considered at the level of specific individuals.

We believe that the long-term solution to this problem is more in-depth, etic research that explores how employees think, feel and react when facing dissatisfying events and situations. This would combine the strengths of multi-dimensional scaling studies of how employees perceive various behaviors with those of field studies of behavior enactment. Until such studies are conducted, however, we propose 4 categories of adaptive behaviors, as well as 3 categories of impulsive, affectively-driven behaviors.

Adaptive Behaviors

Problem-Solving responses represent constructive (from the employee's point of view) attempts to remove the source of dissatisfaction. These are often referred to more generally as Voice (Farrell, 1983; Withey & Cooper, 1989) (and as Attempts at Change by Rosse and Miller, 1984). "Voice" generally connotes an opportunity to be heard, which is certainly a part of what we term problem-solving. However, there are other ways of reaching the goal of removing the source of dissatisfaction, so we have chosen problem-solving as a more general description. It includes

such behaviors as presenting problems to a manager, working with a supervisor or coworkers to change working conditions, making unilateral changes in how you do work (to make it less stressful or more rewarding, for example), or even joining a union.

Planned Exit corresponds to the category of job withdrawal, and includes decisions to quit, transfer, or retire in order to avoid the source of dissatisfaction. It is distinguished from impulsive quitting because exit is chosen explicitly as a means of adapting to the current, dissatisfying situation.

Planned Avoidance represents more short-term strategies for avoiding dissatisfaction, such as taking a day off, coming in late or leaving early, or avoiding duties while at work. It roughly corresponds to the work withdrawal category suggested by Hanisch and her colleagues or to the Neglect category proposed by Farrell and by Withey and Cooper (Farrell, 1983; Withey & Cooper, 1989). Like Planned Exit, it is limited to behaviors that are chosen by the employee as a means of adapting rather than as impulsive behaviors.

Equity-enhancing Retaliation broadens most conceptions of withdrawal/adaptation by noting that violent or aggressive behavior can also represent a coping mechanism (Robinson, 1994). It includes aggressive behaviors that restore satisfaction by either increasing the employee's outcomes (e.g., stealing), reducing his or her inputs (e.g., sabotaging the production process), or reducing the outcomes of other employees (e.g., gossiping/backstabbing or otherwise making life miserable for others).

Capitulation reflects the observation that some employees do not

respond actively to dissatisfaction, at least in the short run. For example, consider an employee in a start-up company who learns through a news story that the CEO's compensation is 20 times greater than his own. Suddenly his previously acceptable salary looks meager, and the "family" culture of the company looks like a sham. Dissatisfied and feeling betrayed, he begins to look for a job at other dot.com companies. After some searching, he discovers that the salary gap he's experienced is actually pretty typical and that his salary is more than competitive. As a result of readjusting his expectations, he has successfully adapted even without making any behavioral changes. Another example of this category is actually closer to Hirschman's idea of Loyalty, in that it involves waiting patiently for things to improve, such as when pay declines and work increases in response to a shift in demand for an employer's product or service. In most cases, however, this strategy is adaptive only in the short term (at best); unless the situation improves fairly quickly, the consequence for mental and physical health of "hanging in there" or, worse, giving up can be quite negative (Rosse & Hulin, 1985).

Impulsive Behavior

One concern with our approach to explaining behaviors is that it presumes a certain amount of rationation on the part of employees. That is, employees are presumed to engage in some sort of mental calculus that results in both an evaluation of whether they are satisfied and how they should respond if they are dissatisfied. Is it reasonable to assume that most people engage in this kind of active processing before engaging in the kinds of behavior we are discussing? On the one hand, it is quite possible that

much behavior follows highly automated processing that may seem—even to the actor—to be spontaneous. Consider the employee who, once again, is insulted by her boss while making a presentation. Because that behavior has occurred before, and probably to other employees as well, she has already "thought about" her potential responses. Habit, based in part on prevailing norms and in part on prior active processing, probably predicts what her immediate response will be.

But in some cases, more impulsive behaviors result. This includes the person who gets "fed-up" and just quits on the spur of the moment, with no thought (past or contemporaneous) about the consequences of the action or about alternative responses. Similar less serious examples of what we previously described as Avoidance would be the person who wakes up feeling tired, looks out the window to see that a cold rain is falling, and hits the "snooze" button on the alarm radio without ever asking himself how much work he needs to accomplish that day or how much sick leave he has remaining.

The third category of impulsive behavior, which we term "cathartic retaliation," can be seen in the frustrated employee who verbally or physically assaults a fellow employee or supervisor just because it "feels good" in the short run.

As is evident in each of these examples, impulsive behavior is fundamentally different from the categories of "adaptive" behavior in two important ways. The first is that they are not driven by an attempt to adapt to the dissatisfying situation. In fact, these kinds of impulsive behaviors can often be counter-productive. The second difference is that impulsive behavior is

driven by an entirely different motivator than are the categories of adaptive behavior, a topic to which we now turn.

Drivers of Behaviors

Following Weiss and Cropanzano's (1996) recommendations, our model includes two distinct drivers of behavior: job (dis)satisfaction and workplace emotions. While job satisfaction is seen as primary motivator of adaptive behaviors, workplace emotions are proposed to be the proximal cause of impulsive behaviors.

Job Satisfaction

Most models of job satisfaction describe a process in which employees compare their perceptions of the work experience (both intrinsic and contextual factors) to their preferences (which are complexly determined by past experience, social comparisons, economic conditions, and other factors beyond the purview of the current paper) (Locke, 1976). The result of these comparisons is an evaluation of being either satisfied or dissatisfied; this evaluation is multidimensional, but with a strong general or overall factor (Smith, 1992).

Although job satisfaction is based on a summary evaluation of many stimuli, there is probably some sort of trigger event that stimulates the evaluation process. As long as situations are not changing, or changing only slowly, we no longer routinely evaluate our satisfaction with a situation. It takes some particular shock—such as learning that a coworker is being paid more than you, being reassigned to a less challenging job, or even being asked to complete a job satisfaction survey—to activate a conscious re-evaluation of the situation. Thus Figure 1 shows a Trigger

Event as moderating the linkage between work conditions (defined broadly) and the job satisfaction evaluation process.

A critical assumption in our model is that being dissatisfied has different motivational effects than being satisfied. Dissatisfaction is by definition unpleasant, and the fundamental motivational assumption underlying our adaptation model is that being dissatisfied creates a catalyst for action (Dawis, 1992). Satisfaction, by contrast, creates no motivation for behavior change; rather it encourages a continuation of the status quo.

Dissatisfaction plays a critical role in the adaptation process precisely because there is a pervasive tendency towards behavior maintenance rather than behavior change. Put simply, people are creatures of habit; all else being equal, behavior is likely to become routinized and persist with little conscious thought (Weiss & Ilgen, 1985). Indeed, both general motivational theories (Atkinson & Birch, 1978) and some theories of attendance (Fichman, 1974) suggest that the most interesting motivational question is the process by which behavior changes.

If employees evaluate their situation and conclude that they are dissatisfied, the next step is to review and evaluate different ways of responding. This is a complex process, and is influenced by a number of variables. One key variable is the employee's perception of external opportunities. A substantial literature shows that alternative job opportunities are a critical factor affecting turnover (Hulin, Roznowski, & Hachiya, 1985). We propose that alternatives play a similar role in affecting a wide range of adaptive behavior. For example, Withey and Cooper's test of the Exit/Voice/Loyalty/Neglect model is based on the

assumption that the choice among these alternative strategies is based in large part on the perceived benefits and costs of each (Withey & Cooper, 1989). Costs, in turn, are strongly influenced by alternative job opportunities. For example, it is less risky to be absent, to goof off, or to complain if you believe there are plenty of other job opportunities should your employer choose to sanction your behavior.

While perceived alternative opportunities have a general effect of increasing the range of adaptive options considered, two other factors have a more idiosyncratic effect. One is the individual's past experience, either directly or vicariously experienced. If workers learn that taking an occasional "mental health day" helps relieve stress, they will probably continue to consider this as an option in future stressful situations. Similarly, workers can learn from observing coworkers that one cure for boredom may be playing games on the job; this social learning can then affect their own adaptive behavior. Closely related to this process is the role of social norms. Behaviors that are accepted or even encouraged by group norms are more likely to be enacted than those that are counter-normative (Johns & Nicholson, 1982).

One possible outcome of this evaluation of alternatives is cognitive readjustment. That is, one result of searching for and evaluating alternatives may be a conclusion that one's present situation is not as bad as initially thought. This adjustment to expectations then feeds back into the initial evaluation component of Figure 1, and may lead to a state of relative job satisfaction (and thus behavior maintenance).

Alternatively, the search of alternatives may produce a set of

behavioral options. In the next step in the proposed model, these strategies are evaluated and a response option is chosen. We propose that this decision step is affected by three key variables. The first of these is organizational commitment; feeling personally committed to the organization is hypothesized to increase the likelihood of Problem-Solving or Capitulation responses, and decrease the likelihood of Exit, Avoidance, or Retaliation. The second variable is perceived control; research suggests that employees who feel that they can have an impact on what happens in their firm are more likely to try to change dissatisfying conditions rather than withdraw or capitulate (Parker, 1993; Withey & Cooper, 1989). The third category of variables hypothesized to affect the choice of adaptive strategy is Emotional Reserve and Emotion Control Skills (note in Figure 1 that this variable set is also proposed to moderate the relationship between the evaluation of work conditions and job dissatisfaction, as well as the relationship between negative workplace emotions and impulsive behavior.) Employees with greater emotional reserve can "tough out" situations that would create dissatisfaction for others, and are also likely to take a more Stoic approach to how they adapt when they do feel dissatisfied. Specifically, compared to those with low emotional reserve, they are more likely to wait for things to improve rather than taking matters into their own hands. Employees with better emotion control skills are also less likely to become dissatisfied, and to use problem-solving strategies when coping with dissatisfaction.

Workplace Emotions

The second driver of behavior is negative emotional reactions, particularly anger. Weiss and Cropanzano (1996) suggest that emotional reactions occur in response to specific triggering events, such as being criticized publicly or finding out that a coworker is being paid more than you. They suggest that these emotions lead to affect- (versus cognition-) driven behaviors. As shown in Figure 1, these include such avoidance behaviors as being absent (or late, etc.) or impulsively quitting. In accordance with the frustration-aggression hypothesis (Berkowitz, 1989), this category also includes retaliatory behavior in which the “motive” is the emotional release provided by “blowing up,” either at the source of the frustration or a hapless bystander.

Unlike the case with job satisfaction, we presume that the relationship between strong negative emotions and impulsive behavior is relatively direct. As a result, the only moderators we propose are emotional reserve and emotion control skills. Employees with greater emotional reserve have a larger capacity for negative affect, and are thus less likely to “go over the brink” and act impulsively. Here the factor is how much negative affect one can *tolerate* without responding. Emotion control skills, on the other hand, pertain to how one copes with negative affect. Employees with better-developed emotion control skills are less likely to *respond* impulsively to a given level of affect or frustration.

Other Model Characteristics

Although space limitations preclude a complete description of the nuances of the model, a few important characteristics and limitations should be noted.

Feedback mechanisms

Since the underlying motivation for the adaptive behaviors proposed in the model is to cope with dissatisfaction, it is important to describe the consequences of behavior enactment. In general, enacting an adaptive behavior should decrease job dissatisfaction, but it is not expected that doing so will always have that effect. For example, an employee who is dissatisfied with pay may take a day off in order to reduce her contributions and thereby restore equity. However, if she is sanctioned for the absence, or finds an even bigger pile of work on her desk upon her return, the net effect on job satisfaction may be nil or even negative. For that reason, the feedback loop from adaptive behavior enactment leads to the evaluation and appraisal of work, where it combines with other factors to lead to a new cycle of evaluation, the result of which may or may not be increased satisfaction with work.

We also propose a feedback loop from impulsive behavior, although it is somewhat different from that for the adaptive behaviors. Since the driver of impulsive behaviors is negative emotions rather than job satisfaction, we do not assume that engaging in these behaviors will necessarily increase job satisfaction. Indeed, it is quite possible that some of these behaviors will produce consequences that will sharply reduce job satisfaction. Similarly, enactment of these behaviors may have

different effects on negative emotions. While absence, for example, has been described as a mechanism for “mood repair,” aggressive behavior can also have a self-reinforcing effect in which negative emotions are perpetuated. (Although one category of impulsive behaviors is labeled “cathartic retaliation,” catharsis refers to the motivation for the behavior rather than its necessary consequence. Thus a person may lash out at a coworker because it “feels good” at the moment, yet later react to their own behavior with shame or even disgust.) Therefore, we propose a feedback loop in which enactment of impulsive behaviors serves as a trigger event that may affect subsequent emotions and which also prompts re-evaluation of satisfaction with work.

Modeling Stochastic Processes

It is important to emphasize that the model we are describing suggests a stochastic, rather than deterministic, relationship between behavior drivers and behaviors. That is, while we propose that a general lawful relationship exists between the two categories of behavior and their respective behavior drivers, these relationships are very much probabilistic in nature. This may be particularly evident in the case of negative emotions. We are all occasionally in a “bad mood,” but we don’t necessarily act out our negative feelings. But if we’re in a bad mood and yet another aversive event occurs, there may be an abrupt shift from inaction to impulsive—even violent—behavior. That is, there is likely to be a discontinuous relationship such that emotions produce serious behavioral reactions only after a threshold is reached. The point of this threshold in turn depends on the individual’s emotional reserve and emotion control

skills. A similar process may apply to the adaptive behaviors wherein a threshold of dissatisfaction may need to be breached before adaptive behavior is enacted. Or it may be that there are separate thresholds for different categories of behaviors, as is implied by a “progression of withdrawal” concept. If these processes are in fact stochastic, we should not expect linear relationships between either dissatisfaction or negative emotions and resulting behavior. One implication may be the increased use of cusp/catastrophe modeling to study these behavior processes.

Exogenous Factors

A final comment has to do with explanatory factors that are not included in the model. As we noted in the beginning of this paper, our intent is not to explain or predict all examples of the behaviors that are described in Figure 1. We completely agree with Blau and others that these behaviors are complexly determined, and that many instances of withdrawal in particular have minimal association with job satisfaction or negative affect. The important question is the proportion of behaviors that can be explained by reactions to work, both for our theoretical understanding of how work factors affect behavior and for the very practical reason that employers presumably have more ability to change workplace causes of these behaviors. This is ultimately an empirical question. While empirical results to date suggest that the proportion is rather low, our hope is that a more complete representation of the multiple processes leading to these behaviors will ultimately substantially increase the proportion of explained variance.

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