

Systematic Literature Review of Counterproductive Work Behavior From Several Perspectives

*Counterproductive
Work Behavior and
Performance*

Muhammad Takrim^{1*}; Abdul Haeba Ramli²; Safuan³; Edi Hamdi⁴

¹⁻⁴Doctor of Management, Business and Economy Faculty,
Esa Unggul University, Jakarta, Indonesia 11510

¹takrim@student.esaunggul.ac.id; ²abdul.haeba@esaunggul.ac.id;

³safuan@esaunggul.ac.id; ⁴edi.hamdi@esaunggul.ac.id

1193

Submitted:
JANUARY 2025

Accepted:
MARCH 2025

ABSTRACT

Creative Work Behavior (CWB) has emerged as a critical factor in enhancing organizational innovation, adaptability, and long-term sustainability. However, empirical findings regarding its impact on various organizational outcomes remain fragmented and inconclusive. This study aims to systematically review the literature on the relationship between CWB and organizational outcomes, with a focus on identifying key themes, trends, and research gaps. Using a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) approach, we analyzed 45 peer-reviewed journal articles published between 2012 and 2023, sourced from major academic databases including Scopus and Web of Science. The results reveal that CWB positively influences outcomes such as organizational performance, employee engagement, and innovation capability. The review also highlights mediating and moderating variables such as leadership style, organizational culture, and psychological safety. This study contributes to the literature by synthesizing existing knowledge and offering a conceptual framework for future research and managerial practice in fostering creative behaviors at work.

Keywords: creative work behavior, organizational outcomes, systematic literature review, innovation, employee performance

INTRODUCTION

Counterproductive work behavior (CWB) is a complex phenomenon that requires a holistic approach to prevent and manage it. By understanding its causes and impacts, organizations can develop effective strategies to create a more positive and productive work environment.

CWB encompasses employee actions that harm the organization or its members, and understanding its predictors and mechanisms is crucial for mitigating its impact. Research indicates that narcissism, particularly when both explicit and implicit, significantly predicts CWB, with the most toxic combination being high levels of both forms of narcissism (Fatfouta & Schwarzing, 2024). Individual differences in judgment and decision-making (JDM) also play a crucial role, where recognizing social norms and a rational decision-making style are negatively associated with CWB, while an avoidant and spontaneous decision-making style, along with the perceived benefits of unethical behavior, are positively associated with CWB (Alaybek et al., 2023). Additionally, variations in individual vitality influence CWB, with higher vitality reducing minor CWB, although core self-evaluation (CSE) does not moderate this relationship as expected (Spanouli & Hofmans, 2021).

Illegitimate tasks, which violate norms regarding what can be reasonably expected from employees, are another important predictor of CWB, as they undermine professional identity and self-concept, leading to counterproductive behavior despite being actively performed (Semmer et al., 2010). Disruptive behavior, often observed in high-stress

JIMKES

Jurnal Ilmiah Manajemen
Kesatuan
Vol. 13 No. 2, 2025
pp. 1193 - 1202
IBI Kesatuan
ISSN 2337 - 7860
E-ISSN 2721 - 169X
DOI: 10.37641/jimkes.v13i2.3380

environments such as healthcare, exacerbates CWB, with the majority of healthcare professionals reporting exposure to such behavior, which negatively impacts patient safety and job satisfaction (Turner et al., 2020). In clinical settings, interventions such as audits and feedback, communities of practice, and local opinion leaders have shown potential in modifying nurses' behavior, although their effectiveness in reducing CWB still needs to be fully understood (Fontaine et al., 2019). Theoretical frameworks such as Foucault's concept of "counter-conduct" and Butler's notion of "persistence" provide a lens for understanding how employees resist dominant power structures, potentially leading to CWB as a form of dissent (Hafeez, 2023). Economic principles, such as the law of supply, reveal that increasing monetary rewards can sometimes reduce prosocial behavior, indicating that extrinsic incentives may inadvertently enhance CWB by undermining intrinsic motivation (Wollbrant et al., 2022).

Ultimately, errors in effort estimation, particularly when influenced by beneficial outcomes, can lead to suboptimal behavior, highlighting the importance of accurate effort-reward predictions in minimizing CWB (Pooresmaeili et al., 2015). Collectively, these findings underscore the multifaceted nature of CWB, which is influenced by personality traits, decision-making styles, perceived task legitimacy, workplace environment, and broader socioeconomic factors, necessitating a comprehensive approach to effectively address and mitigate such behavior within organizational settings.

Counterproductive work behavior (CWB) is a multifaceted phenomenon influenced by various individual and situational factors. Counterproductive workplace behaviors, such as unprofessional conduct, can undermine organizational trust (Dabekaussen et al., 2023). This phenomenon requires diverse approaches to understand and mitigate counterproductive behavior in the workplace, including decision-making processes, situational stressors, and broader socioeconomic factors. By employing this systematic literature review, evidence has been obtained to address the research questions. The research questions (RQs) in this study include:

RQ1: What research methods have been used to study counterproductive work behavior, and in which years?

RQ2: Which countries have examined counterproductive work behavior over the past ten years?

RQ3: How many citations have been obtained in the last ten years related to research on counterproductive work behavior?

This study also identifies the topics frequently analyzed by researchers over the past decade, specifically from 2014 to 2024. Additionally, it examines the research methods used by scholars from various countries. Furthermore, this study highlights gaps in the literature, providing future researchers with potential areas for further exploration.

This systematic literature review aims to provide a comprehensive overview of counterproductive work behavior (CWB) over the past ten years, particularly at the managerial level. It seeks to understand the extent to which CWB occurs, the factors influencing it, and its impact on organizations. Managers play a crucial role within organizations, and their counterproductive behavior can significantly affect team performance and overall organizational outcomes. Among managers, such behavior includes instances where individuals may engage in unethical actions, such as sabotage, to improve their performance rankings. While informing individuals about their relative performance enhances overall effort, introducing opportunities for sabotage significantly reduces performance. This highlights the dark side of competition for status, where some individuals resort to harmful behaviors to climb the status hierarchy (Charness et al., 2014).

This study focuses on explaining counterproductive work behavior (CWB) within companies. Such behavior can occur not only at lower employee levels but also among managers. Previous research on CWB has shown that an individual's behavior in the workplace plays a crucial role in determining a company's productivity. Counterproductive work behavior, such as unprofessional conduct among hospital staff, can have detrimental effects on staff well-being and patient outcomes (Churruca et al.,

2023). Counterproductive work behavior also reveals that individuals may engage in unethical actions, such as sabotage, to improve their performance rankings (Charness et al., 2014). Another study also explains that counterproductive work behavior refers to deliberate actions by employees that harm the organization or its stakeholders (Travis & Craig, 2023). Counterproductive work behavior at the managerial level is a serious issue that affects organizational performance and well-being. This systematic literature review provides a strong foundation for the development of better policies and management practices.

Despite the growing body of literature on Creative Work Behavior (CWB), previous studies have produced fragmented findings with limited integration across contexts and constructs. Most existing research tends to focus on isolated variables or specific organizational settings, lacking a comprehensive synthesis that reveals overarching patterns and critical boundary conditions. Moreover, there is a noticeable scarcity of studies that examine CWB in non-Western or developing country contexts, which limits the generalizability of current knowledge. This study addresses these gaps by conducting a systematic literature review of 45 empirical articles published between 2012 and 2023, offering an integrative framework that links CWB with various organizational outcomes while highlighting the role of mediating and moderating factors. The original contribution of this review lies in its holistic synthesis of fragmented findings, identification of key theoretical trends, and articulation of future research directions that bridge conceptual inconsistencies and expand cross-cultural relevance.

METHODS

The systematic literature review in this study employs the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis) model. The PRISMA model is used to enhance transparency and completeness in reporting systematic reviews and meta-analyses (Elsman et al., 2022). PRISMA provides guidelines through four main stages: identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion (Page et al., 2021).

The process of identifying and selecting articles for this study followed the PRISMA 2020 guidelines. Initially, a total of 1,125 records were identified through systematic searches of major academic databases, including Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar. In addition, 35 records were obtained from manual searches and reference tracking, resulting in a total of 1,160 records.

After removing duplicate entries, 980 records remained for screening. Titles and abstracts of these records were reviewed, leading to the exclusion of 815 records that were deemed irrelevant to the topic of Creative Work Behavior (CWB) or did not meet the initial inclusion criteria.

Subsequently, 165 full-text articles were assessed for eligibility. Of these, 120 articles were excluded due to reasons such as lack of empirical data, insufficient methodological rigor, or misalignment with the research focus on CWB. Ultimately, 45 articles met all criteria and were included in the qualitative synthesis.

The search was conducted using Scopus, focusing on the variable “counterproductive work behavior” with a ten-year limitation from 2014 to 2024 and restricted to English-language publications. This ensures that the selected references are accurate and useful for monitoring counterproductive work behavior within a company at the managerial level.

This study serves as a strong reference and contributes to improving productivity within companies, particularly at the managerial level, by incorporating the keyword “counterproductive work behavior” in the Scopus search system. Scopus was selected as the reference source due to its high quality and credibility at the international level. Another reason for its selection is its extensive coverage, the relevance of journal information, and its continuous updates. The literature search for this study was conducted on July 2, 2024. The next step involved applying specific limitations in the Scopus search process. Inclusion criteria consisted of publication year, search topic, language, document type, research subject area, and open access availability. This study

employed Boolean search techniques using terms such as “counterproductive work behavior” and “counterproductive work behavior” AND “manager.” Journal articles that did not meet the selection criteria, were irrelevant, or did not focus on the managerial level were excluded.

The first step in the search process was filtering journals related to counterproductive work behavior from the past ten years (2014–2024). The initial search in Scopus using the article title, abstract, and keywords returned 898 journal articles. The search was then refined by limiting results to articles only, reducing the number to 786. Further filtering was applied to include only English-language journal articles, resulting in 767 articles. The next stage involved restricting the publication stage to "final," yielding 725 journals. Additionally, the search was refined to include only open-access journals, narrowing the selection to 287 articles. Given the large number of results, further refinement was made by restricting the subject area to business, management, and accounting, reducing the number of relevant articles to 120. For a more precise search, the author applied an additional restriction by specifying the research locus.

A final search was conducted within Scopus using the title, abstract, and keyword fields, incorporating the keyword “counterproductive work behavior” AND “manager” within the same database. The final search string used was TITLE-ABS-KEY ("counterproductive work behavior" AND "manager"), which resulted in a final selection of 11 relevant research journal articles.

The following is the process model used to filter journal articles analyzed in relation to counterproductive work behavior:

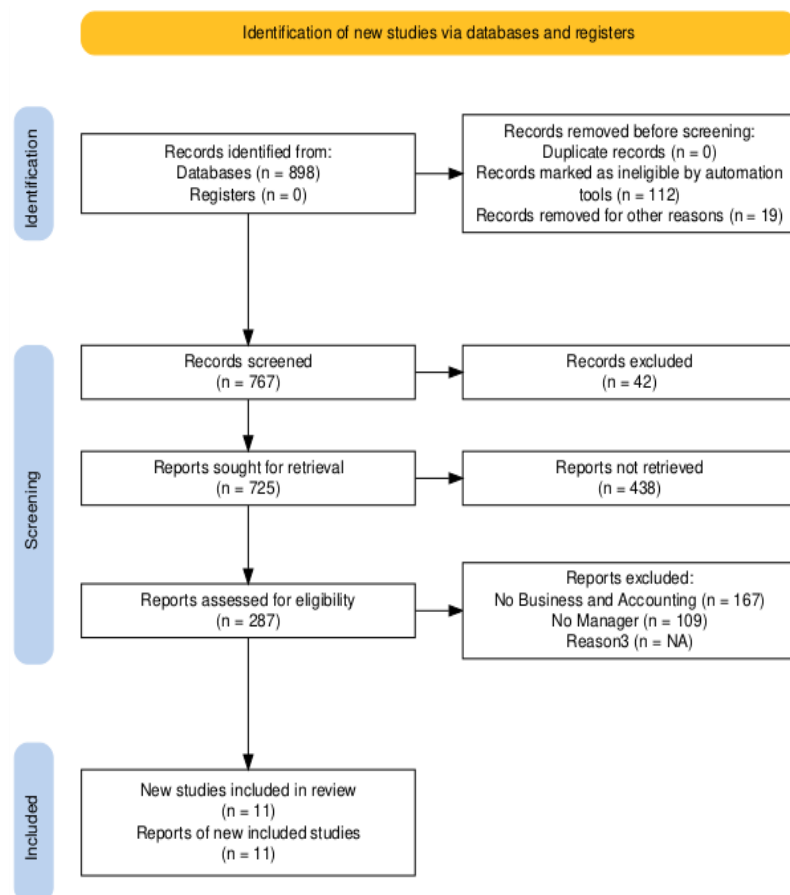


Figure 1 Counterproductive Work Behavior (CWB) PRISMA Model

This study references journal articles from Scopus published between 2014 and 2024, identifying 11 journals relevant to the research variable of counterproductive work behavior within the past seven years. In 2017, one journal article was found, followed by

four articles in 2018, two articles in 2019, two articles in 2020, one article in 2021, and one article in 2022.

Table 1 Number of Documents by Year

Year	Number of Documents
2022	1
2021	1
2020	2
2019	2
2018	4
2017	1

Additionally, this study also draws references from nine countries, including the United States with six journal articles, the Netherlands with two journal articles, the United Kingdom with two journal articles, and Canada, France, India, Israel, New Zealand, and Poland, each contributing one journal article.

Table 2 Number of Documents by Country

Year	Number of Documents	Year	Number of Documents
United States	6	India	1
Netherlands	2	Israel	1
United Kingdom	2	New Zealand	1
Canada	1	Poland	1
France	1		

In addition to providing a descriptive explanation of statistics based on publication year and country of origin, this study also includes an analysis of citation counts from journal articles over the past ten years. Through the final screening using the PRISMA model, 11 journal articles related to counterproductive work behavior were identified, 10 of which have been cited by other researchers. In 2019, these articles received a total of 8 citations from 4 different journal articles. In 2020, the number of citations increased to 15 from 7 different journal articles. In 2021, citations further rose to 22 from 7 journal articles. In 2022, the citation count surged to 48 from 9 journal articles. The following year, in 2023, citations increased again to 72 from 8 journal articles. Finally, in 2024, a total of 34 citations were recorded from 8 different journal articles. Based on this data, the total number of citations obtained is 199 from 10 journal articles related to counterproductive work behavior. A more detailed explanation is provided in the table below:

Documents	Year	11	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	Subtotal	>2024	Total
Total		0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	8	15	22	48	72	34	199	0	199
1 Counterproductive work behaviors and wor...	2022	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	9	6	18	0	18
2 Interpersonal conflict and counterproductiv...	2021	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	13	14	12	40	0	40
3 Achieving corporate sustainability performa...	2020	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	5	2	9	1	19	0	19
4 The relationships between psychological co...	2020	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	1	3	0	3
5 In the Aftermath of Unfair Events: Understa...	2019	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	3	9	9	17	10	49	0	49
6 Leader- And team-member exchanges and ...	2019	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	1	5	6	2	16	0	16
7 Suspicion at Work: The Impact on Counterp...	2018	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	3	1	1	6	0	6
8 The relationships between organizational ci...	2018	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	0	0	0	3	0	3
9 The perceived fairness of work-life balance ...	2018	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	3	4	8	11	1	30	0	30
10 Machiavellianism, job autonomy, and coun...	2018	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	3	0	4	5	0	15	0	15

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the review of journal articles related to counterproductive work behavior (CWB) using the PRISMA model, 11 journal articles were identified as the main topics of discussion in this study. These journals examine the relationship between CWB and other

relevant variables over the past ten years. For example, a study conducted by Lee (2020) explores how corporate sustainability performance is influenced by corporate ethical values and leader-member exchange, demonstrating that employee behavior plays a crucial role in an organization's success. The article explains that employee behavior can either enhance organizational citizenship behavior or reduce counterproductive work behavior depending on contextual factors. The methodology employed in this study includes exploratory factor analysis to assess the factorability of variables, followed by confirmatory factor analysis to test the fit and validity of the measurement model. A structural model was then used to test the hypotheses. Multi-item scales were utilized to measure variables, with various measurement scale formats adopted to reduce common method bias. A Likert scale ranging from 1 to 7 was used for different constructs. In terms of practical implications, this article highlights the importance of fostering an ethical work environment and building high-quality relationships with direct managers to positively influence employee behavior, which in turn impacts corporate sustainability performance.

Furthermore, another study conducted by van Dun et al. (2017) on Lean Management also discusses the importance of positive relationship-oriented behavior, including actively listening and agreeing, while avoiding counterproductive behaviors such as task monitoring and providing negative feedback. Effective alignment of lean leadership with value groups such as excellence/self-improvement and openness to change contributes to a better understanding of lean management practices. This study involved a systematic literature review using Web of Science, Scopus, and Google Scholar to identify relevant papers, resulting in the selection of 21 articles and one book for analysis. The methodology employed the Delphi Method, consisting of three rounds, in which experts were surveyed online with open-ended and closed-ended questions about values and behaviors.

The practical implications suggest that effective lean managers should actively listen, agree with their followers, avoid command-and-control behavior, embrace change, and build strong human relationships to create psychological safety and encourage open communication. This study also highlights the relationship between employers' perceptions of psychological contracts and counterproductive work behavior (CWB) among employees, focusing on relational and transactional expectations. Small and medium-sized enterprise (SME) employers have high expectations with a predominantly relational character, but moderate fulfillment perception, leading to a moderate level of counterproductive work behavior (CWB) (Protsiuk, 2020). Data collection was conducted through questionnaires distributed to managers and owner-managers of SMEs in the construction industry in Ukraine, focusing on the issues and challenges faced by these businesses. The practical implications of this study emphasize that the relational nature of psychological contracts can influence employee engagement and performance, helping employers develop better relationships with their employees.

The relationship between these variables is also closely linked to organizational citizenship behavior (OCB), as aligned with the study conducted by Bauer et al. (2018). This study examines the relationship between OCB demands, future OCB displays, and counterproductive work behavior (CWB). The research involved 464 U.S. residents recruited through Amazon Mechanical Turk, who completed two online surveys with a one-week interval. The practical implications suggest that managers should recognize that OCB demands can predict future OCB displays as well as counterproductive work behavior (CWB). In another case, Capitano & Cunningham (2018) explored the impact of employee suspicion toward managers on CWB and OCB through two studies involving surveys and experiments. The first study utilized a cross-sectional survey of 251 working adults, while the second study employed a randomized vignette experiment with 219

working adults to examine the effects of workplace suspicion on CWB and OCB. The findings indicate that managers and HR practitioners should address workplace suspicion early to mitigate counterproductive work behavior (CWB) and promote organizational citizenship behavior (OCB).

The study conducted by Rehman & Shahnawaz (2018) explores the relationship between Machiavellianism, job autonomy, and counterproductive work behavior (CWB) among managers in India. This research was conducted using Smart PLS version 2 to test hypotheses, with path coefficients converted into t-statistics through bootstrapping with 5,000 samples to interpret the results. Additionally, another study examined the relationship between Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) and Team-Member Exchange (TMX) with Counterproductive Work Behavior (CWB) by Shkoler et al. (2019), where the research was moderated by envy and group size in Israel and the United States. The study applied Harman's single-factor model and the common method factor model, with participants including 186 employees from various organizations and industries in the United States. Organizations should prioritize maintaining positive relationships between employees and managers to reduce counterproductive work behavior (CWB), as fostering strong relationships among team members is crucial in preventing negative workplace behaviors. Further insights into this variable reveal how emotional intelligence and gender moderate the relationship between interpersonal conflict and counterproductive work behavior (CWB) among employees (Kundi & Badar, 2021). This study utilized a five-item scale to measure interpersonal conflict and a 12-item scale to assess emotional intelligence, with items rated on a five-point Likert scale.

The explanation of counterproductive work behavior (CWB) variables was also provided by Barclay & Kiefer (2019), who focused on understanding employees' subjective experiences and their responses to unfair events, emphasizing the role of emotions such as anger and anxiety in shaping behavior and overall justice perceptions. This study employed a diary study with event sampling to capture real-life instances of unfair events in the workplace. Meanwhile, another study explored the perceived fairness of work-life balance policies among managers and professionals who live alone without children, highlighting the importance of placing individual justice orientation within the context of organizational policies and evaluating fairness in relation to career development opportunities (Wilkinson et al., 2018). In terms of practical implications, HR practitioners should review existing policies to ensure they cater to employees beyond those with caregiving responsibilities, considering a more inclusive approach to work-life balance for all employees. Empirical studies also provide insights into how an ethically focused Management Control System (MCS) can reduce counterproductive work behavior (CWB) and self-centered workplace climates within organizations (Bellora-Bienengraber et al., 2022). The study employed surveys based on previously used measurement scales to ensure content validity, with translations into German. This research highlights the importance of a formal ethical infrastructure in shaping ethical behavior and underscores the impact of peer managerial behavior on CWB.

The findings of this systematic literature review indicate that Creative Work Behavior (CWB) plays a significant role in enhancing a wide range of organizational outcomes, including innovation capability, employee engagement, job performance, and adaptability to change. Across the 45 reviewed studies, a consistent pattern emerges: employees who demonstrate higher levels of creativity in their daily work tend to contribute more effectively to organizational innovation and long-term sustainability.

However, the relationship between CWB and organizational outcomes is not uniformly linear or direct. Several mediating and moderating variables were identified, such as leadership style (e.g., transformational or empowering leadership), organizational culture (e.g., support for innovation), psychological safety, and employee autonomy. These variables often act as enablers or barriers to the manifestation of CWB in practice. For instance, the presence of psychological safety can amplify the positive effects of CWB, while authoritarian leadership can suppress it.

Notably, methodological variations across studies—such as the use of self-report measures, differing definitions of CWB, and variations in organizational contexts—suggest the need for a more standardized conceptual framework. Furthermore, the majority of studies were conducted in Western contexts, with limited representation from emerging economies, indicating a gap in cross-cultural perspectives.

This review contributes to the theoretical development of CWB by synthesizing fragmented empirical evidence and identifying key constructs that interact with CWB to shape organizational outcomes. It underscores the importance of viewing CWB not as an isolated trait but as a dynamic behavior influenced by contextual and organizational factors. Future theory-building should integrate CWB into broader models of organizational behavior and innovation, particularly by including mediators such as intrinsic motivation and moderators such as organizational justice or knowledge-sharing climate.

For practitioners, the review highlights the critical need to cultivate environments that foster creativity at work. Leaders play a central role in this process; those who adopt transformational or empowering leadership styles are more likely to encourage CWB among their teams. Organizations should also invest in building a culture that values experimentation, tolerates failure, and provides employees with autonomy and psychological safety. These conditions are essential for unlocking the creative potential of employees, thereby improving innovation and competitive advantage.

Moreover, performance management systems should be reoriented to recognize and reward creative efforts, not just outcomes. Training programs that focus on creative thinking, problem-solving, and cross-functional collaboration can further enhance employees' ability to engage in CWB.

CONCLUSIONS

The conclusion of this study provides a comprehensive review of counterproductive work behavior (CWB) in organizations, the factors influencing it, its relationships with other variables, and its practical implications. This research examines empirical literature trends on CWB over a ten-year period, identifying relevant explanatory variables based on previous studies. The findings indicate a total of 898 articles related to this topic, published in various Scopus-indexed journals. Through a screening process that applied several criteria, including publication year, a focus on business, management, and accounting, English-language articles, final publication stage, and open-access availability, the number of journal articles was refined to 287. Further narrowing the research locus to managerial levels resulted in a final selection of 11 journal articles.

Several of the selected journals from the final screening process collectively explain that the configuration and metric invariance over time for overall justice assessment, problem-prevention behavior, and counterproductive work behavior indicate that these constructs are measured consistently across different time points. Cultural differences, such as those between Israel and the United States, may influence the moderating effects of envy and group size on interpersonal counterproductive work behavior (CWB). Similarly, aspects such as mandatory organizational citizenship behavior, supervisor pressure, measurements of organizational and counterproductive work behavior, justice assessments, and the correlations between LMX (Leader-Member Exchange), TMX (Team-Member Exchange), and envy are also relevant. This conclusion provides insights into the dynamics of counterproductive work behavior in the workplace, the role of leadership and team interactions, as well as the reliability of measurements for various organizational constructs.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

We sincerely appreciate the invaluable support and guidance from our academic mentors and colleagues, whose insights have greatly contributed to the completion of this research. Additionally, we extend our gratitude to the institutions and databases,

particularly Scopus, for providing access to the relevant literature that formed the foundation of this study.

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