Psychological Entitlement and Work-related Outcomes during the Covid-19 Pandemic. The Role of Telecommuting as a Moderator

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Received 12.08.2021; Received revised 30.11.2021; Accepted 16.12.2021
Available online 30.12.2021

Telecommuting is a necessary change imposed by the Covid-19 pandemic. However, little is known about its interactions with the employees' personal traits and their impact on work-related outcomes. With this study, we aimed to test the moderating role of telecommuting on the relationship between psychological entitlement and three work outcomes (job satisfaction, counterproductive work behavior and organizational citizenship behavior). Also, job satisfaction was included as a mediator between psychological entitlement and counterproductive work behavior, respectively organizational citizenship behavior. Our sample consisted of 253 employees who were either telecommuting or working from their workplace. The moderated mediation analyses showed significant differences between the two groups. The outcomes of telecommuting and their managerial implications are discussed.

Keywords: telecommuting, psychological entitlement, job satisfaction, counterproductive work behavior (CWB), organizational citizenship behavior (OCB), Covid-19

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The Covid-19 pandemic brought important changes in people's lifestyles. Not only that personal life was affected by the need for social distancing, but many individuals were also confronted with significant changes in their work lives. To protect their employees, many companies had to try telecommuting as an alternative to receiving employees at their workplace. These changes lead to the need of recontextualizing the previous knowledge linking employee's personality traits and various work-related outcomes. With this study, our aim was to test whether telecommuting can moderate the relationship between psychological entitlement and job satisfaction. Moreover, we tested the mediation role of job satisfaction in the relationship between psychological entitlement and counterproductive work behavior, respectively, organizational citizenship behavior.

Firstly, the link between psychological entitlement (PE) and job satisfaction was studied in the past, with consistent results showing negative associations between the two (Byrne et al., 2010; Dragova-Koleva, 2018; Harvey & Martinko, 2009). However, telecommuting was never tested as a potential contextual variable that can impact this relationship. Moreover, the association received little to no attention during the current pandemic, a situation that further increased the need for telecommuting. Our first aim in this study was to see whether the relationship is different based on the employee's telecommuting activities.

With our second aim, we want to further explore the work-related implications of PE. Past studies showed significant associations with counterproductive work behavior (CWB) and organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) (Gong et al., 2018). Not only that, but job satisfaction was also related to the two outcomes (Czarnota-Bojarska, 2016; Huang et al., 2012). Thus, we considered that there is enough empirical evidence for a proposed model where we introduced job satisfaction as a mediator between PE and CWB, respectively, OCB. In

addition, by using telecommuting as a potential moderator between PE and job satisfaction, we also tested the relationships for the employees who worked from home and for those who worked from their workplace. Another novel addition to the field is that we focused on Romanian employees, a population for which these associations received reduced empirical attention. In conclusion, with this study, we verify some relationships that were previously unexplored in Romania, and we also test whether and how the pandemic-imposed telecommuting practices shaped these associations (see Figure 1).

Psychological entitlement

Heightened psychological entitlement is considered a problematic antecedent for various work-related behaviors (O'Leary-Kelly et al., 2017; Stavrou & Ierodiakonou, 2016). Moreover, its relatively high prevalence in current generations of employees (Trzesniewski et al., 2008) has raised the interest in its correlates and outcomes (see Jordan et al., 2017 for a review). From a psychological standpoint, PE can be seen as "a relatively stable tendency toward highly favorable self-perceptions and a tendency to feel deserving of preferential treatment, and high levels of praise and reward, regardless of actual qualities, efforts and performance levels" (Dragova-Koleva, 2018, p.35). Recent literature points towards two important conceptualizations of PE. The first one views entitlement as a component of narcissism (Raskin & Terry, 1988). According to this view, the self-esteem that is usually associated with larger levels of narcissism fuels the development of high entitlement in narcissistic individuals (Barry et al., 2003; Emmons, 1984). Thus, entitled individuals can be described as more self-righteous, demanding and more prone to fulfill their self-serving goals through unethical means (Fisk, 2010).

In later years, entitlement started to be seen as a stand-alone concept, related, one that is not framed within the boundaries of narcissism (Campbell et al., 2004). The difference between the two views can be summarized by Jordan and collaborators (2017, p. 126), who considered that “narcissistic entitlement included unreasonable expectations of favorable treatment and automatic compliance from others, while the focus in the new framework is on inflated self-perceptions of deservingness and expecting more than others.” Thus, psychological entitlement can also be conceptualized as a non-pathological trait, one that, however, still can have maladaptive consequences on work-related behaviors.

Job satisfaction

Job satisfaction is one of the most studied constructs related to the work domain, with nearly 80 % of the studies conducted on job attitudes during this century involving measurements of job satisfaction (Judge et al., 2017). Job satisfaction can be defined as the overall evaluative judgment one has about his/her job, on a continuum from positive to negative (Weiss, 2002). Moreover, this evaluation can target the overall impressions about a job or the specific aspects of a job, such as a task, pay, promotions, colleagues, or supervisors (Judge et al., 2017).

Psychological entitlement and Job Satisfaction

Past research shows that PE and job satisfaction are negatively related, the individuals with higher levels of entitlement also showing lower levels of job satisfaction (Byrne et al., 2010; Dragova-Koleva, 2018; Harvey & Martinko, 2009). Other studies pictured a more complex relationship by showing that the negative relationship remained significant only in low accountability work settings and became non-significant in high accountability settings (Laird, Harvey, & Lancaster, 2015). These results can be explained by the tendency of entitled individuals to have more inflated views of themselves and their abilities (Judge et al., 2006), which leads to their subsequent perceived overqualification (Maynard et al., 2015). At the same time, higher entitlement is related to higher levels of unmet expectation (Naumann, Minsky, & Sturman, 2002). Taken together, these mechanisms show how entitled individuals can become increasingly dissatisfied and frustrated with various aspects of their jobs which can cause lower engagement and lower job satisfaction (Joplin et al., 2019; Harvey & Harris, 2010). By taking into account previous evidence, the current research posits that PE plays an important role in shaping job satisfaction. Thus, we propose the first hypothesis:

H1: A higher level of psychological entitlement is related to a lower level of job satisfaction.

Counterproductive Work Behavior

An important body of organizational research concentrates on the relationship between individual differences and various workplace behaviors, both desirable and undesirable (Gruys & Sackett, 2003). Thus, one of the concepts that received the most attention in recent years is counterproductive work behavior (CWB; Dalal, 2005). Described as a dysfunctional behavior that voluntarily violates organization norms and threatens the well-being of the employees and the organization (Robinson & Bennett, 2005), CWB can involve absenteeism, incivility, service sabotage, or even interpersonal aggression and violence (Kelloway et al., 2010). CWB can be described along two dimensions: severity (ranging from minor to severe) and target (interpersonal deviance and organization deviance) (Robinson & Bennett, 2005). Regardless of the dimension, CWB can lead to important financial losses for the company (Bowling & Burns, 2015).

Psychological Entitlement and CWB

PE is related to several negative work behaviors, such as conflict with supervisors (Harvey & Martinko, 2009), unethical negotiation tactics (Neville & Fisk, 2019), knowledge hiding behavior (Alnaimi & Rjoub, 2019) and low job performance (Joplin et al., 2019). The link between PE and CWB is also well-supported by the previous literature. Not only that Penney and Spector (2002) found that narcissism was related to CWB, but similar results were revealed by Grijalva and Newman's (2015) more recent meta-analysis. In their study, the link between the entitlement dimension of narcissism and CWB, as well as the link between entitlement measured as a stand-alone concept and CWB were positive and significant. Also, even in similar domains, such as the academic domain, entitlement predicted counterproductive behaviors (study absence and careless survey responding) (Taylor et al., 2015). Finally, PE was related to unethical pro-organization behaviors which, although different from CWB by having different motivations behind them, have similar effects and can harm the organization (Lee et al., 2019).

Organizational Citizenship Behavior

Organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) is „a cluster of behaviors that benefit the organization and/or groups and individuals with it” (Penner et al., 1997, p. 112). Similar to CWB, OCB can also be directed towards the individuals or towards the organization (Dalal, 2005). Regardless of their direction, OCB and CWB are negatively related, but the strength of the relationship is relatively small (Dalal, 2005). However, contrary to CWB, OCB has important positive effects on business outcomes, such as organization effectiveness (Koys, 2001).

Psychological Entitlement and OCB

Current generations are considered to be more entitled compared to the previous, so it is expected for them to have lower levels of OCB. This assumption was confirmed by a study showing that millennials are less interested in OCB (Gong et al., 2018). Also, stronger levels of excessive, revenge-driving entitlement are related to lower levels of OCB (Szalkowska et al., 2015). Moreover, more entitled individuals respond by involving themselves in lower OCB when they perceive psychological contract violation from the organization (Priesemuth & Taylor, 2016).

Based on the previously explored links between PE and CWB, respectively OCB, we propose the next hypotheses:

H2: A higher level of psychological entitlement is related to a higher level of counterproductive work behavior.

H3: A higher level of psychological entitlement is related to a lower level of organizational citizenship behavior.

PE, job satisfaction, CWB, and OCB

In our literature review, we showed that PE is related to job satisfaction, CWB and OCB. A diverse body of literature also shows that job satisfaction is related to CWB (Czarnota-Bojarska, 2015; Fida et al., 2015; Zhang & Deng, 2016) and OCB (Claudia, 2018; Huang et al., 2012; Murphy et al., 2002; Ng et al., 2019; Pio & Tampi, 2018; Saifi & Shahzad, 2017; Zeinabadi, 2010) in various countries and professions. There are also previous studies showing that job satisfaction mediates the relationship between personality traits and CWB, respectively OCB (Mount et al., 2006). These findings determine us to also predict that job satisfaction would act as a mediating mechanism between PE and CWB, respectively OCB. As such, we hypothesize that:

H4: Job satisfaction mediated the relationship between psychological entitlement and counterproductive work behavior.

H5: Job satisfaction mediated the relationship between psychological entitlement and organizational citizenship behavior.

Figure 1. The moderated mediation model

Telecommuting, Psychological Entitlement and Work Outcomes

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, many employers had to impose restrictions regarding their employee's access to the workspaces. Thus, telecommuting became a part-time or, in many cases, a full-time working arrangement for an important number of Romanian employees. However, previous studies show a rather unclear relationship between telecommuting and various work outcomes, especially job satisfaction. Some studies, such as the meta-analysis of Gajendran and Harrison (2007) and, more recently, the research of Caranto and collaborators (2020) show a positive relationship between telecommuting and job satisfaction. On the contrary, other studies, such as those of Cooper and Kurland (2002) or Kuruzovich and collaborators (2021), show a negative relationship, especially when there are important limitations in the software used for remote work. There is also an important body of research pointing towards a unifying view. Some studies show that there is a reversed-shaped relationship between telecommuting and job satisfaction. When employees rarely use telecommuting, the relationship is negative, but it becomes positive with higher levels of telecommuting. However, at extreme levels of telecommuting, there is a plateau or the association reverses to being a negative one (Golden & Veiga, 2005; Virick et al., 2010). Moreover, at extreme levels of telecommuting, the relationship with promotions and salary growth becomes negative (Golden & Eddleston, 2020). Thus, using telecommuting is not necessarily detrimental to job satisfaction. However, excessive use of telecommuting, during the pandemic, has negative effects on job satisfaction.

It is also worth noting that the negative impact of PE can be rather contextual, as it depends on various situational factors (O'Leary-Kelly et al., 2017). For example, the link between PE and negative work outcomes is stronger when the organizational practices are weaker (Fisk, 2010). Thus, it is probable that in the case of telecommuting, the employees would perceive the work conditions as more indulgent and less regulated, which would strengthen the proposed negative link between PE and job satisfaction. As such, we hypothesize:

H6: Telecommuting would moderate the association of psychological entitlement and job satisfaction.

H7: Telecommuting would moderate the indirect association of psychological entitlement and counterproductive work behavior.

H8: Telecommuting would moderate the indirect association of psychological entitlement and organization citizenship behavior.

Method

Participants

This research was conducted during the second wave of the Covid-19 pandemic, between December 2020 and January 2021. The sample was composed of 253 community-dwelling adults who were employed at the time of data collection. The instruments were distributed to various online groups and specifically targeted employees. In this sample, 197 (77.9 %) respondents were women and 56 (22.1 %) were men. The mean age was 30.31 years old ($SD = 9.97$) and the mean length of employment was 54.13 months ($SD = 73.79$). When study level is concerned, 68 (26.9 %) participants reported finishing high school, 106 (41.9 %) finished Bachelor's studies, 77 (30.4 %) had a Master's degree and 2 (0.8 %) held a Ph.D.

Measures

Psychological entitlement was measured with Campbell and his collaborators' (2004) Psychological Entitlement Scale. This instrument contains 9 items (ex. "I honestly feel I'm just more deserving than other"), measured on a Likert-type scale from 1 (strong disagreement) to 7 (strong agreement). For this sample, $\alpha = .81$, $M = 34.47$, $SD = 9.19$.

Job satisfaction was measured with Spector's (1985) Job Satisfaction Survey. The scale contains 36 items (ex. "When I do a good job, I receive the recognition for it that I should receive"), measured on a Likert-type scale from 1 (disagree very much) to 6 (agree very much). For this sample, $\alpha = .93$, $M = 146.02$, $SD = 30.16$.

Counterproductive work behavior was measured with Spector and his collaborators' (2006) Counterproductive Work Behavior Checklist. The scale contains 10 items (ex. "I Insulted or made fun of someone at work") measured on a Likert-type scale from 1 (never) to 5 (daily). In our sample, $\alpha = .71$, $M = 14.92$, $SD = 3.91$.

Organization citizenship behavior was measured with Fox and his colleagues' (2012) Organizational Citizenship Behavior Checklist. The scale contains 20 items (ex. "I took time to advise, coach, or mentor a co-worker") measured on a Likert-type scale from 1 (never) to 5 (daily). However, to make the scale more suitable for telecommuting, we eliminated three items that measured workplace-specific behaviors (such as lifting heavy object, bringing food, or decorating the workplace). In our sample, for this version of the scale, $\alpha = .92$, $M = 51.17$, $SD = 13.47$.

Telecommuting was measured using one item (During the pandemic, you are working from") with a binary response option ("home" and "my workplace"). In our sample, 134 participants were working from home and 119 were working from the workplace.

To test the proposed model, we run a moderated mediation using the PROCESS macro for SPSS (Hayes, 2018). Whether the participants were telecommuting or not during the pandemic was introduced as a moderator in the relationship between PE and job satisfaction, which was introduced as a mediator in the relationship between PE and CWB and OCB. Two models were run, one for CWB and one for OCB. These models allowed us to analyze: (1) the effects of PE on CWB / OCB, both directly and indirectly, mediated by job satisfaction and moderated by telecommuting, (2) the effect of PE on job satisfaction (as moderated by telecommuting) and (3) the effects of job satisfaction on CWB / OCB. We evaluated the significance of the indirect effects by using bias-corrected confidence intervals (CI = 95 %) with 5 000 bootstrap samples.

Results

Whereas Table 1 presents zero order correlations among variables, table 2 depicts the direct relationships from our models. We found a significant and negative association between PE and job satisfaction ($b = -1.36$, $p = .03$). Job satisfaction was significantly and negatively related with counterproductive work behavior ($b = -.05$, $p < .001$) but it was

not significantly related to organizational citizenship behavior ($b = -.03$, $p = .24$). Psychological entitlement had a significant and positive direct link with counterproductive work behavior ($b = .05$, $p = .03$). However, it had a non-significant direct relationship with organizational citizenship behavior ($b = -.06$, $p = .19$).

Telecommuting moderated several of the proposed relationships. For the associations between psychological entitlement and job satisfaction, when the participants were telecommuting, the relationship was significant and negative ($b = -.67$, $p = .01$). However, when the participants were working from the workplace, the relationship became non-significant ($b = .01$, $p = .97$). Table 3 displays the moderated relationships from our models.

We also found a significant moderating effect of telecommuting for the indirect effect of PE on counterproductive work behavior through job satisfaction. This effect was significant only for the participants working from home ($b = .03$, 95 % CI [.002; .06]), but not for those who still went to work ($b = -.001$, 95 % CI [-.03; .03]). On the contrary, the indirect effect of PE on organizational citizenship behavior through job satisfaction was non-significant for both those who worked from home ($b = -.02$, 95 % CI [-.02 .07]) and from the workplace ($b = -.001$, 95 % CI [-.03; .02]).

Table 1 Zero order correlations among variables

	1	2	3
1. Psychological entitlement	-		
2. Job satisfaction	-.11	-	
3. Counterproductive work behavior	.17**	-.40***	-
4. Organizational citizenship behavior	-.03	-.07	.01

Note: ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

Table 2. Direct effects from the moderated mediation analyses

	coeff	se	p
Psychological entitlement → job satisfaction	-1.36	.63	.03
Telecommuting → job satisfaction	-.68	3.77	.85
Psychological entitlement → Counterproductive work behavior	.05	.02	.03
Psychological entitlement → Organizational citizenship behavior	-.06	.09	.50
Job satisfaction → Counterproductive work behavior	-.05	.007	<.001
Job satisfaction → Organizational citizenship behavior	-.03	.02	.24

Table 3. Moderated effects from the moderated mediation analyses

	effect	se	LLCI	ULCI
Telecommuting	<i>Psychological entitlement → job satisfaction</i>			
Yes	-.67	.27	-1.22	-.13
No	.007	.30	-.60	.61
	<i>Psychological entitlement → job satisfaction → counterproductive work behavior</i>			
Yes	.03	.01	.002	.06
No	-.001	.01	-.03	.03
	<i>Psychological entitlement → job satisfaction → organizational citizenship behavior</i>			
Yes	.02	.02	-.02	.07
No	-.001	.01	-.03	.02

Discussion

This paper aimed to test whether telecommuting mediated the link between psychological entitlement and job satisfaction, as well as whether job satisfaction mediated the association between psychological entitlement and counterproductive work behavior, respectively, organizational

citizenship behavior. It is important to note that telecommuting significantly moderated most of the proposed direct and indirect relationships. This shows that the negative effects of PE on job-related outcomes (job satisfaction and CWB) are dependent on the working environment. Also, our results confirm the importance of the situation when discussing these links (Fisk, 2010). It is possible for the employees to feel that the tasks are

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less structured and more indulgent when working from home. This, in turn, might accentuate the impact PE has on job satisfaction and CWB. Moreover, telecommuting can be seen as offering less accountability, which is a favorable environment for the development of the negative outcomes for PE (Laird et al., 2015). When the formal accountability is low, the relationship between performance and reward is unclear. This confusion can accentuate the already inflated expectations of the individuals with higher levels of PE, but also their frustration when formal rewards are not received. Thus, individuals with higher PE can feel lower levels of job satisfaction because they feel they are not sufficiently rewarded during their telecommuting activities. On the contrary, in the case of a more structured working environment, such as that from the workplace, this negative relationship seems to be kept to a minimum.

Furthermore, we found that telecommuting moderated the indirect relationship between PE and CWB, job satisfaction mediating this association only for those who were telecommuting. Previous studies show that CWB can appear as a reaction to unmet expectations, which can result in retribution on the part of the employee. For example, Czarnota-Bojarska (2015) found that the strongest relationship between low job satisfaction and CWB was found among a group of employees who “‘get back’ at the organization and co-workers because they perceive their work as unsatisfactory” (p. 466). This also explains why PE is associated with CWB through job satisfaction. Telecommuting is an environment that predisposes individuals with high PE to low job satisfaction, but we must also consider their higher risk of unmet expectation and also their propensity towards revenge (Żemojtel-Piotrowska et al., 2016). Also, telecommuting might determine employees to feel more isolated, which can lower their access to organizational justice, which, in turn, is related to CWB (Skholer et al., 2021). Once all the conditions are met, the individual predispositions and the situation can determine the employees with higher PE to partake in more CWB to get revenge for their deflated satisfaction. It is also interesting to note that we found no relationship between PE and OCB, which shows that the more entitlement-driven employees respond to lower job satisfaction with more counterproductive behaviors, but they do not alter their levels of pro-social behaviors.

Our results are valuable because they show the importance of the contextual variables when discussing the negative effects of psychological entitlement in the work domain. Although telecommuting can bring substantial financial benefits for the organization and the employees by allowing normal working possibilities during the Covid-19 pandemic, it also poses note-worthy risks. Based on their personality structure, some employees might consider telecommuting as a hindrance in their career and respond in negative ways to such a change. This pattern is especially apparent for the employees who display higher levels of PE, who accuse lower levels of job satisfaction and higher levels of CWB when telecommuting.

These results also have notable managerial implications. CWB can be seen as a form of protest on the part of the highly entitled employees (Kelloway et al., 2010). Thus, one possible way to deal with this is to reassure the employees that working from home does not impact accountability and does not reduce their chances to receive the rewards they deserve. Autonomy, schedule flexibility and good technology can help the employees to feel more in control of their work outcomes (Jamal et al., 2021). Moreover, previous studies have shown that excessive telecommuting has negative effects on job satisfaction, but the relationship was positive when employees alternated between telecommuting and going to their workplace (Golden & Veiga, 2005; Virick et al., 2010). As such, it is important to offer the possibility to work in rotation, from home and from the workplace, whenever this is possible. Finally, the employer can try to combat some of the possible

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negative effects of telecommuting by offering various training programs targeting the employee's levels of coping, which was shown to improve perceived work productivity (Chang et al., 2021).

While relevant, our study had some limits that should be discussed. Firstly, the sample was composed of Romanian employees. Thus, the results are specific only to our culture, future studies testing the same relationships being needed to extend the findings to other countries and cultures. Secondly, we investigated only the employees' own psychological entitlement. Other studies show that supervisor's entitlement and other's entitlement behavior can have an impact on job-related outcomes (Eissa & Lester, 2021; Hackney et al., 2017). It would be important for future studies to consider these findings and to test a more complex model including all the actors of the working environment. Finally, previous research showed that gender is an important moderator between work-related predictors and CWB (Bowling & Burns, 2015) and that women tend to suffer from more job dissatisfaction during the pandemic (Feng & Savani, 2020). A more gender-balanced sample would be needed to test this potential moderator.

Conclusion

Our study aimed to test the moderating role of telecommuting in the relationship between psychological entitlement and job satisfaction, CWB, respectively OCB. Our findings showed a negative association between PE and job satisfaction in the case of the employees who were telecommuting. Also, we found that job satisfaction mediated the association between PE and CWB, but only for the telecommuting group.

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