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**The Relationship Between Workplace Incivility and Helping Behavior: Roles of Job  
Dissatisfaction and Political Skill**

**Dirk De Clercq**

Goodman School of Business  
Brock University  
St. Catharines, Canada  
[ddeclercq@brocku.ca](mailto:ddeclercq@brocku.ca)

**Inam Ul Haq**

Lahore Business School  
The University of Lahore  
Lahore, Pakistan  
[inamulhaq27@gmail.com](mailto:inamulhaq27@gmail.com)

**Muhammad Umer Azeem**

School of Business and Economics  
University of Management and Technology  
Lahore, Pakistan  
[umer.azeem@umt.edu.pk](mailto:umer.azeem@umt.edu.pk)

**Haq Nawaz Ahmad**

Lyallpur Business School  
Government College University  
Faisalabad, Pakistan  
[haqnawaz353@gmail.com](mailto:haqnawaz353@gmail.com)

### **Abstract**

This article investigates the mediating role of job dissatisfaction in the relationship between employees' perceptions of workplace incivility and their helping behavior, as well as the buffering role of political skill in this process. Three-wave, time-lagged data collected from employees and their supervisors revealed that employees' exposure to workplace incivility diminished their helping behavior through their sense of job dissatisfaction. This mediating role of job dissatisfaction was less salient, however, to the extent that employees were equipped with political skill. For organizations, this study accordingly pinpoints a key mechanism—namely, unhappiness about their job situation—through which rude coworker treatment links to lower voluntary workplace behaviors among employees, and it reveals how this mechanism can be better contained in the presence of political skill.

*Keywords:* workplace incivility; helping behavior; job dissatisfaction; political skill; conservation of resources theory

## The Relationship Between Workplace Incivility and Helping Behavior: Roles of Job Dissatisfaction and Political Skill

Organizations often function as political arenas in which employees seek to advance their personal interests instead of caring for the well-being of others, even if their political activities might hurt organizational effectiveness (e.g., Abbas, Raja, Darr, & Bouckenooghe, 2014; Chang, Rosen, Siemieniec, & Johnson, 2012; Chen & Fang, 2008; Kacmar, Andrews, Harris, & Tepper, 2013; O'Connor & Morrison, 2001). Prior research tends to focus mostly on the dysfunctional elements of such behavior, highlighting people's propensity to engage in selfish, behind-the-scenes activities (Chang, Rosen, & Levy, 2009; Miller, Rutherford, & Kolodinsky, 2008; Wiltshire, Bourdage, & Lee, 2014). In contrast, the notion of political *skill* is anchored in the perspective that certain employee abilities can contribute to individual, team, and organizational effectiveness (Ahearn, Ferris, Hochwarter, Ceasar, & Ammeter, 2004; Banister & Meriac, 2015; Ferris, Perrewé, Anthony, & Gilmore, 2000; Li, Sun, & Cheng, 2017). This important perspective conceives of employees' political skill as comprising four interrelated dimensions: social astuteness, or an ability to understand and interpret social situations; apparent sincerity, which reflects an ability to portray integrity and authenticity in communication with others; interpersonal influence, or the ability to calibrate and adapt actions according to different situations; and network ability, which is the ability to develop beneficial alliances with other organizational members (Ferris, Treadway, et al., 2005; Gill, Lapalme, & Séguin, 2014).

The notion of political skill is related to yet also distinct from other concepts such as political savvy and emotional intelligence, which also capture aspects of employees' social competencies. Political savvy pertains to employees' "adeptness at the nuances of politics in organizations" (Ferris, Treadway, et al., 2005, p. 130) and the degree of understanding that they

have about how decisions are made in their organization (Chao, O'Leary-Kelly, Wolf, Klein, & Gardner, 1994). As such, it is narrower than the concept of political skill and relates most closely to that concept's social astuteness dimension (Ferris, Treadway, et al., 2005). Employees' emotional intelligence instead refers to the emotion-based aspects of employees' interpersonal functioning with peers, whereas their political skill captures adequate abilities and knowledge that go beyond emotions (Ferris, Treadway, et al., 2005). Ferris, Treadway, and colleagues (2005) test the discriminant validity of these two constructs and find correlations across the four dimensions of political skill and emotional intelligence that range between .38 and .43, which they consider "only moderate in magnitude" (p. 146). Notably, previous studies also reveal that employees' political skill enhances their job satisfaction, turnover intentions, and job performance, over and beyond the effect of their emotional intelligence (Banister & Meriac, 2015; Semadar, Robins, & Ferris, 2006). Furthermore, other research indicates that employees' emotional intelligence may be an important factor that influences their political skill (Davis & Peake, 2014; Meisler, 2014). Thus, emotional intelligence pertains to the ability to identify and regulate emotions in interpersonal relationships, whereas political skill reflects "the distinct ability to act upon those emotions in a favorable manner" (Davis & Peake, 2014, p. 19).

The possession of political skill accordingly can be useful for employees, such that it generates positive outcomes such as enhanced task, project, or sales performance (Li et al., 2017; Munyon, Summers, Thompson, & Ferris, 2015; Zhang & Huo, 2015); career progress (Blickle, Oerder, & Summers, 2010); or reputations (Liu et al., 2007). The benefits of political skill also might be more indirect, in that politically skilled employees might be better positioned to cope with various adverse work situations, such as interpersonal conflict (Zhang & Huo, 2015), workplace ostracism (Zhao & Xia, 2017), job tension (Hochwarter et al., 2007), or job-limiting

pain (Ferris, Rogers, Blass, & Hochwater, 2009). This study proposes another, relatively less explored source of adversity that might be mitigated by the possession of political skill, namely, exposure to workplace incivility by coworkers. Rude behaviors can manifest in different ways, such as when coworkers put others down, make condescending remarks, exhibit little interest in their opinions, or exclude them from professional camaraderie (Cortina, Magley, Williams, & Langhout, 2001; Lim, Cortina, & Magley, 2008; Pearson & Porath, 2005). Such workplace incivility has received increasing attention in organization studies, but its persistence and the threat it poses to organizational effectiveness make it a critical topic for continued investigation (Estes & Wang, 2008; Johnson & Indvik, 2001; Schilpzand, De Pater, & Erez, 2016).

In particular, exposure to workplace incivility is stressful for employees and depletes their personal resource reservoirs, thereby threatening their ability to fulfill their job duties (Estes & Wang, 2008; Lim et al., 2008; Sliter, Sliter, & Jex, 2012). Previous studies reveal a broad range of negative consequences of this type of workplace adversity, including interpersonal deviance (Wu, Zhang, Chiu, Kwan, & He, 2014), withdrawal behavior (Lim & Cortina, 2005), and absenteeism (Sliter et al., 2012), as well as a tendency to stop engaging in positive behaviors such as creativity (Sharifirad, 2016), self-enhancement efforts (Chen et al., 2013), or citizenship behaviors (Taylor, Bedeian, & Kluemper, 2012; Thompson, Carlson, Hunter, & Whitten, 2016). This study in turn seeks to investigate factors that inform the relationship between workplace incivility and a specific type of citizenship behavior, that is, *helping* behavior aimed at assisting colleagues in doing their jobs (Choi & Moon, 2016; Frenkel & Yu, 2011; Organ, 1988; Tang et al., 2008). Our focus on this individual-oriented citizenship behavior reflects the recognition of the importance of positive interpersonal interactions for effective organizational functioning (Bachrach, Powell, Collins, & Richey, 2006; Chou & Stauffer, 2016; Nahapiet & Ghoshal,

1998), as well as the general acknowledgment that helping behavior is a critical manifestation of workplace ethics (Deckop, Cirka, & Andersson, 2003; De Clercq, Rahman, & Haq, 2017; Tang et al., 2008).

### **Purpose and Hypotheses**

The purpose of this study is twofold. First, we theorize that an important reason that workplace incivility relates to lower helping behavior may be that employees feel unhappy or dissatisfied about their job situation. Such a sense of job dissatisfaction reflects a depletion of positive emotional resources, such as enthusiasm and excitement, in relation to how employees experience their work (Abbas et al., 2014; Little, Nelson, Quade, & Ward, 2011; Sun & Pan, 2008). Following the logic of conservation of resources (COR) theory (Hobfoll, 1989, 2001), we specifically argue that employees' exposure to adverse coworker behavior, in the form of workplace incivility, may relate to feelings of unhappiness about their job, which in turn may diminish their helping behavior, as informed by their desire to conserve resources in their work-related efforts (McCarthy, Trougakos, & Cheng, 2016). As previous research has established, a sense of unhappiness about a job situation is a mediator that links employees' exposure to stressful work circumstances—such as psychological contract violations (Turnley & Feldman, 2000), contract breaches (Rayton & Yalabik, 2014), or dysfunctional organizational politics (Hsiung, Lin, & Lin, 2012)—to reduced positive work outcomes. However, no empirical studies have investigated its potential mediating role in the relationship between workplace incivility and helping behavior.

Second, employees' political skill may function as a buffer against the depletion of their positive emotional resource bases, as occurs in response to disrespectful coworker treatment. In so doing, it diminishes the odds that this resource depletion leads to reduced helping behavior.

Consistent with COR theory, employees' political skill should provide them with greater access to social resources that they can use to cope with resource-draining work conditions (Hochwarter et al., 2007; Zhao & Xia, 2017). When employees sense that they can deal effectively with adverse coworker relationships by leveraging their political skill, they might contain their negative feelings about their job situation more readily, which leaves them with more discretionary energy to undertake helping efforts that are not part of their formal job descriptions (Hobfoll, 2001). Ultimately, when they are equipped with political skill, the negative relationship between employees' exposure to workplace incivility and their helping behavior, through the mediating role of job dissatisfaction, should be attenuated.

The proposed conceptual framework, with its foundation in COR theory, is summarized in Figure 1. The underlying theorizing evokes six hypothesized relationships: (a) a positive relationship between employees' exposure to workplace incivility and job dissatisfaction (Hypothesis 1); (b) a negative relationship between their job dissatisfaction and helping behavior (Hypothesis 2); (c) a mediating role of job dissatisfaction, which pinpoints emotional resource depletion as a key explanatory mechanism that connects employees' exposure to workplace incivility with diminished helping behavior (Hypothesis 3); (d) a moderating role of political skill that mitigates the positive relationship between workplace incivility and job dissatisfaction (Hypothesis 4); (e) a moderating role of political skill that mitigates the negative relationship between job dissatisfaction and helping behavior (Hypothesis 5); and (f) a moderated mediation role of political skill, such that employees' emotional resource depletion, as a critical mechanism that underpins the negative relationship between workplace incivility and helping behavior, may be less likely to be triggered among employees who are more politically skilled (Hypothesis 6).

[Insert Figure 1 about here]

By testing this conceptual framework, this study makes two key contributions to extant research. First, we apply COR theory to demonstrate that workplace incivility hampers people's propensity to assist coworkers voluntarily, through the influence of reduced positive energy toward and enthusiasm about their job (Penney & Spector, 2005; Welbourne, Gangadharan, & Esparza, 2016). When employees feel frustrated about how they are treated by other organizational members, they may doubt their long-term career prospects with the organization, experience emotional resource drainage, and feel unhappy about their work (Cho, Bonn, Han, & Lee, 2016; Sliter et al., 2012). Such negative feelings in turn may provide employees with an excuse for *not* undertaking helping activities that could contribute to the success of others but that are not formally required (Foote & Tang, 2008; Lu et al., 2013). The experience of job dissatisfaction thus is an unexplored mechanism through which workplace incivility may be associated with lower voluntary helping behaviors.

Second, in response to calls for further research that applies contingency approaches to the outcomes of workplace incivility (Sguera, Bagozzi, Huy, Boss, & Boss, 2016; Welbourne et al., 2016; Wu et al., 2014), we provide novel insights into *when* employees' perceptions of workplace incivility are less likely to materialize as lower helping behavior through unhappy job-related feelings, that is, when they can rely on their political skill. Previous research offers ambiguous support for the harmful role of workplace incivility in thwarting positive work behaviors (Estes & Wang, 2008; Schilpzand, Pater, & Erez, 2016), and prior explanations for this ambiguity suggest that employees may respond differently to disrespectful workplace treatment, depending on individual factors (Schilpzand, Leavitt, & Lim, 2016). For example, researchers have investigated the role of different personal characteristics in how employees react to workplace incivility, including the Big Five personality factors (Colbert, Mount, Harter,

Witt, & Barrick, 2004; Taylor et al., 2012; Taylor & Klueemper, 2012; Wang, Harms, & Mackey, 2015), narcissism (Meier & Semmer, 2013), or negative affectivity (Naimon, Mullins, & Osatuke, 2013). To extend this research line, we investigate how employees' political skill mitigates the mediating role of job dissatisfaction in connecting workplace incivility to reduced helping behavior. This novel perspective helps clarify how organizations can *immunize* their employees against exposure to uncivil behaviors at work, namely, by encouraging them to hone and develop adequate political skills.

## **Research Method**

### **Sample and Data Collection**

The study data were collected from employees in 14 Pakistani-based organizations that operate in various sectors, such as engineering, textiles, beverages, banking, health, and education. A three-wave design was applied, with a time lag of three weeks between each round. These time lags were long enough to reduce concerns about reverse causality but short enough to minimize the possibility that major organizational events might occur during the execution of the study. The surveys were in English, which is the official language of higher education and business communication in Pakistan. In each of the three rounds, the participants were ensured complete confidentiality, with explanations that individual data were accessible only to the research team, no individual identifying information would ever be released, and only general summary data would be made available outside the research team. The surveys also emphasized that there were no correct or incorrect answers, that participants typically give varied responses, and that it was important to answer the questions as honestly as possible. These measures help reduce the likelihood of acquiescence and social desirability biases (Spector, 2006).

The first survey wave measured employees' perceptions of workplace incivility and political skill; the second survey asked about their job dissatisfaction; and the third survey, completed by the employees' supervisors, captured employees' helping behavior. Of the 300 originally administered surveys, 251 were returned in the first round. In the second round, 225 respondents completed the survey, and then 216 surveys were received from the supervisors in the third round. After eliminating surveys with incomplete data, we retained 212 completed sets of surveys for the statistical analyses. Among the responding employees, all were Pakistani nationals, 33% were women, 84% were 40 years or younger, 46% had at least a masters' degree, and 63% had worked for their organization for more than 5 years.

### **Measures**

The measures of the focal constructs used items from previous research, with 5-point Likert scales ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*).

**Helping behavior.** To assess employees' voluntary assisting of coworkers, we applied a four-item scale that has been used in previous studies of positive work behaviors (e.g., De Clercq et al., 2017; Tang et al., 2008; Williams & Anderson, 1991). To avoid concerns about common method bias, we asked supervisors to rate the helping behaviors of employees. Two example items are "This employee assists other employees with their work, even when not asked" and "This employee helps others who have heavy workloads" (Cronbach's alpha = .804).

**Workplace incivility.** We measured employees' exposure to uncivil behaviors with a seven-item scale based on previous studies (e.g., Cortina et al., 2001; Lim et al., 2008; Taylor et al., 2012). For example, employees had to assess the following statements: "My coworkers put me down or are condescending to me," "My coworkers make demeaning or derogatory remarks

about me,” and “My coworkers ignore or exclude me from professional camaraderie” (Cronbach’s alpha = .878).

**Job dissatisfaction.** To measure employees’ job dissatisfaction, we relied on a six-item job satisfaction scale (Abbas et al., 2014; Agho, Price, & Mueller, 1992). Similar to previous studies (e.g., Dailey & Kirk, 1992; Jiang, Baker, & Frazier, 2009), we reverse-coded this scale to measure the extent to which employees feel unhappy about their jobs. One of the items in the original scale (“I am often bored with my job”) already was phrased to reflect high levels of job dissatisfaction. The five other items were reversed-coded, including “Most days I am enthusiastic about my work” and “I find real enjoyment in my work” (Cronbach’s alpha = .764).

**Political skill.** We applied the 18-item scale of political skill, developed and validated by Ferris, Treadway, et al. (2005), that has been used in previous studies of employees’ political activities (e.g., Jawahar & Liu, 2016; Zhao & Xia, 2017). Example items are “I am particularly good at sensing the motivations and hidden agendas of others,” “I am able to communicate easily and effectively with others,” “I try to show a genuine interest in other people,” and “I spend a lot of time at work developing connections with others” (Cronbach’s alpha = .903).

**Control variables.** The analyses included four demographic characteristics: gender (1 = female), age (1 = older than 40 years), education (1 = non-university degree; 2 = bachelor degree, 3 = master degree), and organizational tenure (1 = 1–5 years; 2 = 6–10 years; 3 = more than 10 years).<sup>1</sup>

## Results

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<sup>1</sup> In the regression models that included the control variables (Models 1 and 4 in Table 2), only education had a significant relationship with job dissatisfaction. Following Becker’s (2005) recommendations for control variables, we performed a robustness check by comparing the regression results with and without the inclusion of insignificant control variables. The results were completely consistent between the two sets of regression equations.

The correlation coefficients and descriptive statistics are in Table 1, which reveals a positive correlation between workplace incivility and job dissatisfaction ( $r = .289, p < .01$ ), and a negative correlation between job dissatisfaction and helping behavior ( $r = -.457, p < .01$ ).<sup>2</sup> The regression results are in Table 2: Models 1–3 predict job dissatisfaction, and Models 4–7 predict helping behavior. For each model, the variance inflation factor values are lower than 10, so multicollinearity is not a concern (Aiken & West, 1991).

[Insert Tables 1 and 2 about here]

We argued that employees who face uncivil behaviors at work are more likely to feel unhappy about their job situation (Hypothesis 1). We found support for this hypothesis in the positive relationship between workplace incivility and job dissatisfaction in Model 2 ( $\beta = .131, p < .01$ ). We also found support for the argument that employees' negative feelings about their jobs would be associated with a lower propensity to undertake voluntary efforts that assist other members (Hypothesis 2), according to the negative relationship between their job dissatisfaction and helping behavior in Model 6 ( $\beta = -.176, p < .01$ ).

To assess the presence of mediation by job dissatisfaction (Hypothesis 3), we followed the three-step approach suggested by Baron and Kenny (1986). The aforementioned results indicate a significant relationship between the independent and mediator variables, as well as between the mediator and dependent variables. When accounting for the role of job dissatisfaction, the negative relationship between workplace incivility and helping behavior observed in Model 5 ( $\beta = -.081, p < .05$ ) became insignificant in Model 6 ( $\beta = -.058, ns$ ). Thus, job dissatisfaction fully mediated the relationship between workplace incivility and helping behavior. To confirm the mediation by job dissatisfaction, we also applied the bootstrapping

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<sup>2</sup> Even if the absolute values of these correlations are not very high, particularly for the correlation between workplace incivility and job dissatisfaction—which might be the case due to the relatively small sample size—they are significant and in the predicted direction.

method suggested by Preacher and Hayes (2004), using the Process macro developed by Hayes (2013). This procedure provides confidence intervals (CIs) for indirect relationships and thus avoids the potential statistical power problems that might result from asymmetric or other non-normal sampling distributions of these relationships (MacKinnon, Lockwood, & Williams, 2004). The results indicated that the CI for the indirect relationship between workplace incivility and helping behavior through job dissatisfaction did *not* include 0 [-.057, -.005], in further support for the presence of mediation.

To test the individual moderating effects of political skill, as advanced in Hypotheses 4 and 5, we calculated the interaction term of workplace incivility  $\times$  political skill to predict job dissatisfaction (Model 3) and job dissatisfaction  $\times$  political skill to predict helping behavior (Model 7). Both interaction terms were significant ( $\beta = -.131, p < .05$ ;  $\beta = .335, p < .001$ , respectively). We plot the relationship between workplace incivility and job dissatisfaction in Figure 2 and the relationship between job dissatisfaction and helping behavior in Figure 3, at high and low levels of political skill. We also undertake corresponding simple slope analyses (Aiken & West, 1991). The simple slope analysis for Figure 2 indicated that the relationship between workplace incivility and job dissatisfaction was positive and significant at low levels of political skill ( $\beta = .248, p < .01$ ) but not at high levels ( $\beta = -.014, ns$ ), in support of Hypothesis 4. Similarly, the simple slope analysis in Figure 3 revealed that the negative relationship between job dissatisfaction and helping behavior was significant and negative at low levels of political skill ( $\beta = -.442, p < .001$ ) and significant but positive at high levels ( $\beta = .228, p < .05$ ). This result supports the buffering role of political skill, postulated in Hypothesis 5, and provides the added insight that higher levels of job dissatisfaction *enhance* rather than diminish helping behavior when employees are equipped with political skill.

[Insert Figures 2 and 3 about here]

Finally, the test for the moderated mediation role of political skill predicted in Hypothesis 6 is based on Preacher, Rucker, and Hayes's (2007) procedure and Hayes's (2013) Process macro. Similar to the bootstrapping method to test for mediation, the procedure in this case generates CIs rather than point estimates for the conditional indirect relationships (MacKinnon et al., 2004). As specified in Hayes's (2013) Process macro, these CIs refer to different levels of the moderator (i.e., 10th, 25th, 50th, 75th, and 90th percentiles).<sup>3</sup> The bootstrap 95% CIs for the conditional indirect relationship between workplace incivility and helping behavior at the 10th and 25th percentiles did not contain 0 ([-.160, -.036] and [-.055, -.006], respectively), but the intervals contained 0 at the 50th, 75th, and 90th percentiles of political skill ([-.031, .003], [-.013, .017], and [-.019, .028], respectively). Thus, political skill mitigated the negative indirect relationship between workplace incivility and helping behavior, through job dissatisfaction, in support of Hypothesis 6 and the overall framework.

### **Discussion**

This study adds to extant research by investigating the role of workplace incivility in explaining employees' helping behavior, with a particular focus on factors that influence this process. Despite some attention to how exposure to uncivil coworker treatment might be associated with a reluctance to undertake voluntary work behaviors (Taylor et al., 2012; Thompson et al., 2016), little research has explicitly investigated the mediating role of job-related feelings in connecting employees' workplace incivility with reduced helping behavior, or the circumstances in which this mediating role might be less likely to occur. To fill these gaps, we have drawn from COR theory (Hobfoll, 1989, 2001) to propose that (a) a reluctance to help

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<sup>3</sup> Consistent with our theoretical framework, the tested model includes the moderating effects of political skill on the relationships between workplace incivility and job dissatisfaction *and* between job dissatisfaction and helping behavior.

other organizational members voluntarily, in response to workplace incivility, might arise through employees' feelings of unhappiness about their job situation and (b) their political skill mitigates this process. The results largely confirm these theoretical predictions, with the further interesting finding that job dissatisfaction relates positively to helping behavior, *if* employees are politically skilled.

This study thus offers important insights into how employees' exposure to uncivil coworker treatments may undermine their voluntary helping behaviors. Their emotional resource reservoirs are depleted, as manifest in the presence of job dissatisfaction (Abbas et al., 2014; Little et al., 2011). Explicit investigations of the process by which a resource-depleting work condition such as workplace incivility connects with lower helping behavior toward coworkers have been scant, let alone how certain individual skills might buffer this process (Schilpzand, De Pater, & Erez, 2016). Our study shows that a key factor that underpins the relationship between workplace incivility and helping behavior is that they possess little enthusiasm or excitement about their job situation (Lim et al., 2008; Welbourne et al., 2016). This unhappiness makes employees less prone to reach out to other organizational members and assist them with their job tasks (Foote & Tang, 2008; Lu, Shih, & Chen, 2013; Turnley & Feldman, 2000). A sense of dissatisfaction with the job situation thus is a critical mechanism through which workplace incivility undermines efforts to help coworkers.

In addition, the mediating role of job dissatisfaction is moderated by employees' political skill. As expected, the sense of job dissatisfaction represents a less powerful link between workplace incivility and reduced helping behavior among employees who are equipped with political skill (Ferris, Treadway, et al., 2005). According to COR theory, the resource-depleting effect of an adverse work situation can be subdued to the extent that employees benefit from

resource gains generated through their personal capabilities (Hobfoll, 2001; Zhao & Xia, 2017). In this study's context, the likelihood that employees exhibit unhappy feelings about their job situation when they are treated disrespectfully is lower to the extent that they feel more confident that they can immunize themselves from the associated distress by using social resources generated by their political skill (Hochwarter et al., 2007). That is, politically skilled employees are less likely to be emotionally drained by workplace incivility, due to their seemingly greater capability to cope with and adapt to this adverse situation, as well as find effective solutions to resolve it, by leveraging their social competencies (Bing, Dacvison, Minor, Novicevic, & Frink, 2011; Meurs, Gallagher, & Perrewé, 2010; Zhang & Huo, 2015). Employees equipped with political skill also may derive personal joy from proactively seeking and finding solutions to adverse situations such as workplace incivility (Bing et al., 2011; Ferris, Davidson, et al., 2005), which further reduces their frustration and unhappiness. Conversely, employees who are less politically skilled are less able or motivated to find effective ways to cope with the hardships associated with workplace incivility, so negative feelings and job dissatisfaction are more likely to materialize (Hobfoll, 2001).

Similar to its buffering role in the positive relationship between workplace incivility and job dissatisfaction, political skill also mitigates the negative relationship between job dissatisfaction and helping behavior. Employees equipped with political skill may have a better understanding of how others can benefit from their helping efforts (Zhao & Xia, 2017), believe that voluntary helping behaviors will enhance their own position (Jawahar, Meurs, Ferris, & Hochwarter, 2008), and be more likely to share concerns about their job situation with their network contacts (Ferris et al., 2009). Such features may enable them to contain negative feelings about their job situation better and to avoid escalating them into a reluctance to help

others. An interesting finding in this regard (Figure 3) reveals that job dissatisfaction is positively, rather than negatively, related to helping behavior when employees can rely on adequate political skills. Perhaps employees who are unhappy about their job situation *and* are equipped with political skill are motivated to leverage this skill to help dissatisfied colleagues resolve their issues.

Finally, the buffering roles of political skill in mitigating the relationships between workplace incivility and job dissatisfaction *and* between job dissatisfaction and helping behavior are particularly insightful when considered in combination with the mediating role of job dissatisfaction. As our analysis of the presence of moderated mediation indicates (Preacher et al., 2007), the strength of the negative indirect relationship between workplace incivility and helping behavior through job dissatisfaction depends on how politically skilled employees are. That is, job dissatisfaction connects this resource-draining work condition to reduced helping behavior with less strength when employees can draw on their own political skill. Conversely, the emotional resource drainage that stems from uncivil coworker behaviors (Hobfoll, 2001; Sliter et al., 2012) translates more powerfully into reduced helping behavior, in the form of enhanced job dissatisfaction, to the extent that employees are not very politically skilled.

Overall, this study provides a more comprehensive understanding of the factors that are associated with employees' undertaking of helping behavior. We extend research on positive work behaviors by revealing how (a) a sense of dissatisfaction about a job situation functions as a critical mechanism that connects an important source of workplace adversity (incivility) to reduced helping behavior and (b) employees' political skill mitigates the relationship between workplace incivility and helping behavior through job dissatisfaction. Even though the scope of the tested model is relatively narrow, this study aims to achieve depth, rather than breadth, in

pinpointing an unexplored mechanism by which workplace incivility influences the diminished likelihood of helping behavior. Moreover, the findings extend previous investigations of the *direct* positive role of political skill in generating positive work outcomes (e.g., Li et al., 2017; Liu et al., 2007; Munyon et al., 2015). In particular, we add the insight that employees' unhappy feelings about their job situation in the presence of workplace incivility can be better contained by adequate political skills that counter the hardships resulting from such adversity. To the extent that employees are politically skilled, they are in a better position to mitigate the negative feelings that come with rude behaviors, so they retain sufficient energy to assist their coworkers with their daily job tasks.

### **Limitations and Future Research**

This study has some limitations that suggest further research opportunities. First, the mediating role of job satisfaction identified herein, with a research design that institutes three-week time gaps between the different measurement points, indicates that employees' exposure to workplace incivility generates unhappy feelings about their job situation, which diminish their helping behavior. Such a three-wave design is superior to a cross-sectional design, in which the data would have been collected at the same point in time. However, its non-experimental nature still warrants caution before making causal inferences. Continued studies could complement these findings with laboratory or field experiments that assess the focal variables at multiple points in time, to establish the causal nature of the hypothesized relationships explicitly. In a related vein, an empirical weakness of this study is that the mechanisms that underpin the theoretical relationships were not measured directly, such as the distress that might result from exposure to workplace incivility (Estes & Wang, 2008) or the confidence and joy that politically skilled employees might experience when they cope with uncivil coworker behaviors (Ferris,

Davidson, et al., 2005; Meurs et al., 2010). Additional research thus might investigate, for example, whether ability or motivation mechanisms are more prominent in explaining the buffering role of political skill.

Second, the data set unfortunately did not provide information about how the presence of workplace incivility might *worsen* existing job dissatisfaction. Additional studies could measure employees' job satisfaction levels at different points in time, then investigate, for example, whether the positive relationship between workplace incivility and future job dissatisfaction holds after controlling for current unhappiness about their job situation. Moreover, previous research indicates that employees' exposure to workplace incivility might strengthen the relationship between the presence of work stressors and their experience of strain (Oore, Leblanc, Day, Leiter, Spence Laschinger, & Price, 2010). Similarly, when employees suffer rude, demeaning coworker behaviors, any negative feelings they already have about their job situation could worsen and escalate into even more negative job-related energy. Additional research accordingly might investigate this *invigorating* role of workplace incivility in a similar study context, because this resource-draining work condition may translate previously held feelings of job dissatisfaction more forcefully into negative job attitudes and behaviors.

Third, this study pinpointed job dissatisfaction as an important mechanism that connects workplace incivility to reduced helping behavior, informed by calls for a better understanding of how employees' negative emotions affect the execution of their job tasks if their work relationships feature adversity (Schilpzand, De Pater, & Erez, 2016; Sliter et al., 2012; Welbourne et al., 2016). It also would be interesting to investigate other, related mediators, such as the job-related stress that employees experience in the face of disrespectful coworker

treatment (McCarthy et al., 2016), feelings of psychological withdrawal (Schilpzand, Leavitt, & Lim, 2016), or a desire for revenge (Bies & Tripp, 2001).

Fourth, our focus on political skill as a single contingency factor that mitigates the indirect relationship between workplace incivility and helping behavior might be complemented by considerations of other personal factors. For example, employees' tenacity (Baum & Locke, 2004), self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997), emotional stability (Beehr, Ragsdale, & Kochert, 2015), and innovation propensity (De Clercq & Belausteguigoitia, 2017) may serve as buffers of the negative relationship between workplace incivility and helping behavior through job dissatisfaction. Moreover, studies could compare the relative strength of the buffering effect of political skill on the indirect relationship between workplace incivility and helping behavior with that of other social effectiveness variables, such as emotional intelligence, self-monitoring, or leadership efficacy (Semadar et al., 2006). Positive organizational context factors also might prevent the negative energy that comes with workplace incivility from escalating into lower helping behavior, such as transformational leadership (Dvir, Eden, Avolio, & Shamir, 2002), fair decision-making processes (Cropanzano, Li, & Benson, 2011), or appointments of ombudsmen who independently investigate complaints of organizational misbehaviors (Harrison, Hopeck, Desrayaud, & Imboden, 2013).

Fifth, the hypotheses are country-neutral, but cultural factors might play a role nonetheless. On the one hand, Pakistan is marked by high levels of uncertainty avoidance, so employees tend to be risk averse and experience particular sensitivity to adverse work conditions that add uncertainty to their organizational functioning (Hofstede, 2001). The relative importance of political skill in mitigating the link between workplace incivility and helping behavior through job dissatisfaction thus may be stronger than it would be in countries that are less risk averse. On

the other hand, in a collectivistic country such as Pakistan, employees may consider discretionary helping activities that contribute to the well-being of other organizational peers as strongly desirable, irrespective of the nature of their work environment or job situation, so from that perspective, the mitigating effect of political skill on the indirect relationship between workplace incivility and helping behavior might be weaker in this study context (Hofstede, 2001). Future studies could tease out the distinct and combined roles that different cultural values might play in connecting workplace incivility with helping behaviors through cross-national comparisons. More broadly, the use of multi-country samples could provide further insights into the buffering roles that different personal abilities, whatever their nature, might play in mitigating the hardships that employees experience in the face of adverse workplace conditions across different cultural contexts. Another research avenue would be to compare the role of relevant cultural factors at the *individual* level, such as employees' collectivistic orientation (Triandis & Gelfand, 1998), to investigate their potential as moderators of the relationship between workplace incivility and positive work behaviors, such as helping.

### **Practical Implications**

This study also has important practical implications. Exposure to disrespectful and rude behaviors can undermine employees' engagement in voluntary work activities that otherwise could contribute to organizational effectiveness (Taylor et al., 2012), so organizations must work to diminish such behaviors. However, employees might be reluctant to admit that they have been mistreated, ridiculed, or excluded by colleagues, because they do not want to be seen as weak or overly complaining (Estes & Wang, 2008; Porath & Pearson, 2013). Organizations thus are advised to be proactive in detecting the presence and persistence of rude workplace behaviors and eliminate the possible causes, such as negative role models, informal acceptance of

dysfunctional behind-the-scenes power plays, or extremely high work pressures (Pearson & Porath, 2005; Yoon & Farmer, 2018). Organizations could train employees to build and nurture respectful social relationships and provide guidelines regarding how organizational members may address one another in the workplace, how to avoid derogatory remarks, and how to include colleagues in their communication and decision-making practices.

Beyond this somewhat conventional recommendation that organizations should seek to diminish workplace incivility, this study is perhaps most insightful for organizations that cannot eliminate uncivil interpersonal behaviors completely from their ranks (Schilpzand, De Pater, & Erez, 2016). In particular, employees who can draw on their greater political skill are better prepared to cope with workplace incivility; the political capabilities of their employee bases thus are critical means that organizations can use to mitigate job dissatisfaction and the associated avoidance of voluntary work behaviors when some level of workplace incivility is unavoidable. To the extent that rude and discourteous behaviors are a prominent part of an organizational culture (Estes & Wang, 2008), organizations that can count on politically skilled employees are better positioned to avoid significant emotional drainage among the victims of uncivil behaviors, so their employee ranks still may have sufficient residual energy to undertake voluntary helping efforts. Finding employees equipped with political skill thus might enable organizations to ensure adequate levels of voluntary helping behaviors, even in the presence of workplace incivility. To do so, they might assess and predict the intrinsic motivation that new employees derive from applying their social skills and expertise to cope with and adapt to rude coworker treatment (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Overall, the recruitment of politically skilled employees has especially strong merit for organizations that cannot entirely avoid situations in which some employees will be victims of discourteous or rude coworker behaviors.

In addition to recruiting and retaining employees who are politically skilled, organizations can help their employees develop the associated competencies and soft skills internally (Badawy, Shaughnessy, Brouer, & Seitz, 2016). For example, to stimulate employees' political skill, organizations might explicate which social competencies are most needed to cope with adverse peer relationships that threaten to deprive employees of information through covert exclusion mechanisms. They might showcase role models who effectively meet their job obligations, even when faced with limited access to peer knowledge due to adverse relationships. Furthermore, employees could grow more confident in their ability to deal with disrespectful coworker behaviors to the extent that they are taught how to communicate effectively with peers and sense their motivations and hidden agendas (Ferris et al., 2000; Ferris, Davidson, et al., 2005). Another option would be to design appropriate reward systems. Employees might be more motivated to develop and apply political competencies that lend themselves to adequate solutions to coworker incivility if they receive formal recognition for these efforts, which ultimately could benefit the entire organization. Taken together, this study indicates that any measure that stimulates employees' political skill should be useful in the presence of workplace incivility, because employees with this skill can devise more effective coping strategies to meet their job duties despite the incivility, such that they reserve sufficient energy to undertake voluntary activities as needed.

## **Conclusion**

With this study, we have sought to contribute to extant research by investigating the role of employees' perceptions of workplace incivility in their helping behavior, as well as the roles that their job dissatisfaction and political skill play in this process. Negative feelings about their job situation represent an important mechanism that connects exposure to uncivil coworker

behaviors with lower voluntary helping behaviors. The strength of this mechanism, however, depends on how politically skilled those employees are. We hope that this study in turn can serve as a platform for further investigations of employees' voluntary work behaviors, such as helping, particularly in the presence of challenging work conditions that generally may discourage employees from engaging in these beneficial behaviors.

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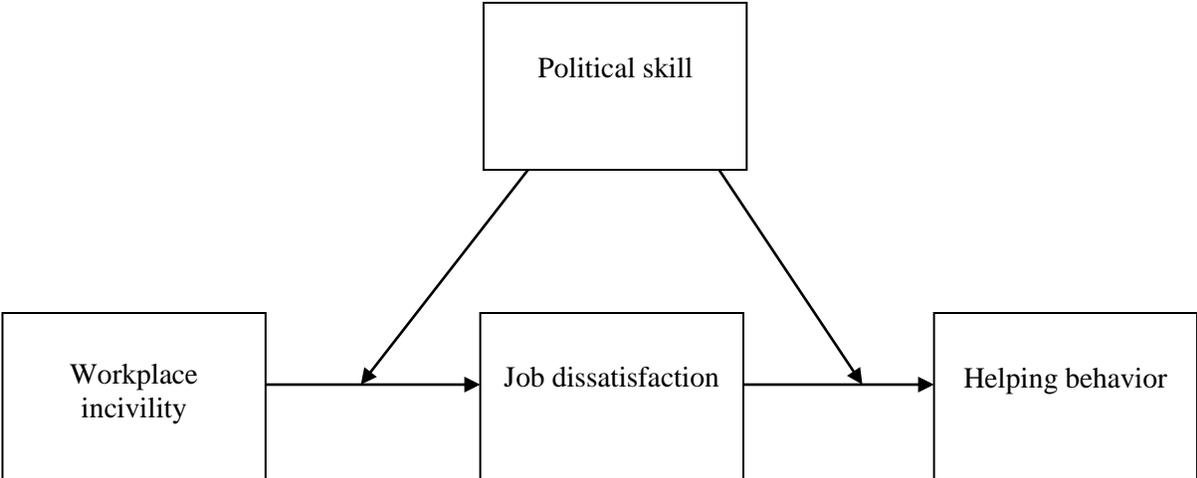
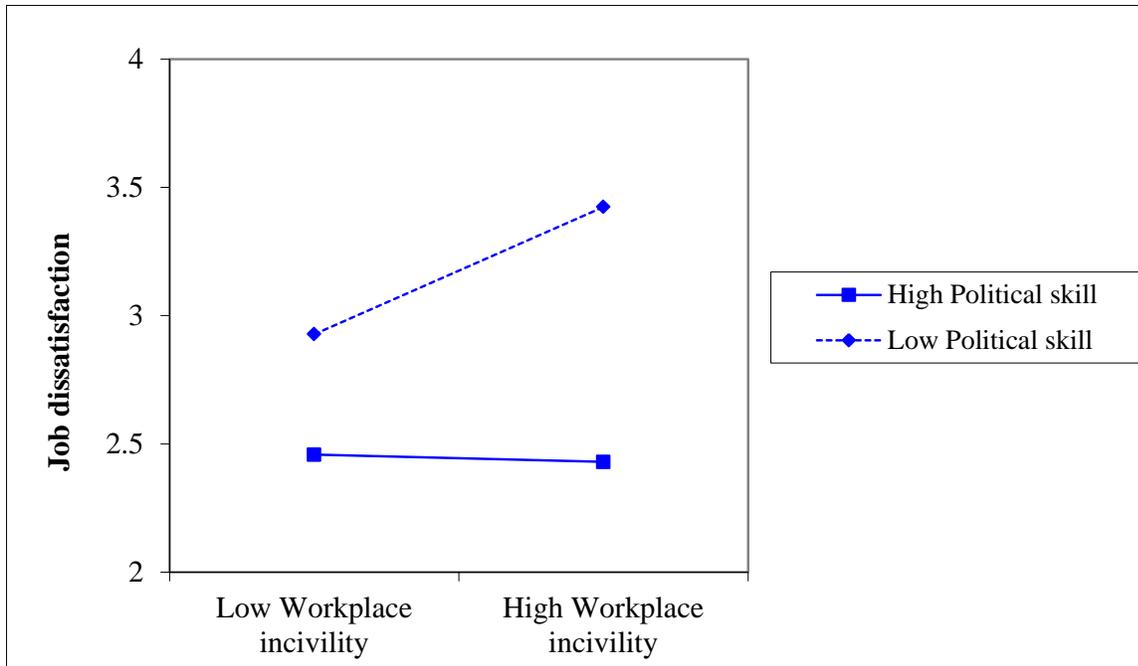


Figure 1. Conceptual model



*Figure 2.* Moderating effect of political skill on the relationship between workplace incivility and job dissatisfaction

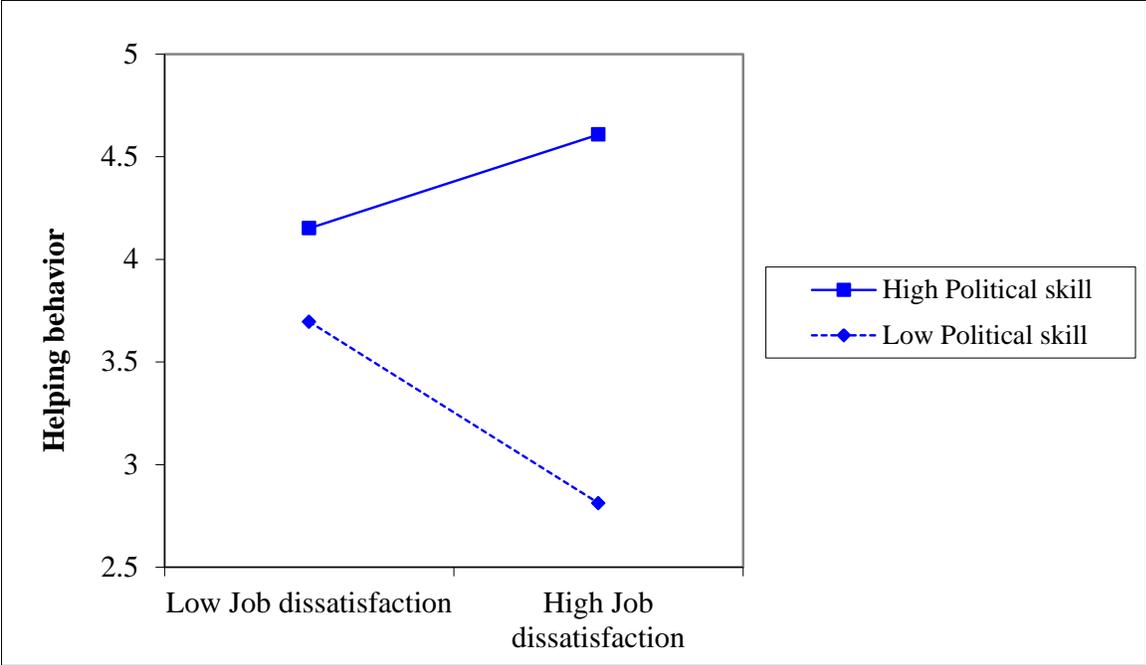


Figure 3. Moderating effect of political skill on the relationship between job dissatisfaction and helping behavior

Table 1

*Correlation Table and Descriptive Statistics*

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Helping behavior								
2. Workplace incivility	-.296**							
3. Job dissatisfaction	-.457**	.289**						
4. Political skill	.705**	-.266**	-.418**					
5. Gender (1 = female)	-.080	.035	-.011	-.037				
6. Age	.038	-.006	-.130	-.040	-.198**			
7. Education	.080	-.150*	-.146*	.073	.252**	.140*		
8. Organizational tenure	.033	.027	-.052	.022	-.112	.473**	-.052	
Mean	4.004	2.309	2.345	3.765	.330	.160	2.340	1.948
Standard deviation	.589	.807	.583	.560	.471	.368	.687	.839

*Notes.* N = 212.

\*\* $p < .01$ ; \* $p < .05$ .

Table 2

*Regression Results*

	Job dissatisfaction				Helping behavior		
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6	Model 7
Gender (1 = female)	-.001	-.056	-.038	-.135	-.057	-.067	-.069
Age	-.172	-.241*	-.228*	-.025	.092	.049	.066
Education	-.111 <sup>+</sup>	-.049	-.046	.095	.015	.006	.002
Organizational tenure	-.005	.011	.006	.024	-.007	-.005	.005
Workplace incivility		.131**	.117*		-.081*	-.058	-.047
Political skill		-.389***	-.366***		.710***	.641***	.563***
Workplace incivility × Political skill			-.131*				
Job dissatisfaction						-.176**	-.107*
Job dissatisfaction × Political skill							.335***
	R <sup>2</sup>	.034	.237	.251	.018	.516	.539
	ΔR <sup>2</sup>		.203***	.014*		.498***	.023**

*Notes.* n = 212 (unstandardized regression coefficients).

<sup>+</sup>  $p < .10$ ; \*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ ; \*\*\*  $p < .001$  (two-tailed tests).