

Does TMX affect instigated incivility?

The role of negative reciprocity and psychological contract violation

Abstract

Purpose - Pervasive and rampant workplace incivility effects have called for more studies on antecedents and possible deterrents of the onset of negative organizational behaviors. Based on Social Exchange Theory (SET), this study proposes a framework investigating the underlying mechanisms of Team-Member Exchange (TMX) on instigated incivility.

Design/methodology/approach - The hypothesized model explores the combined effect of interventions on teams and organizational levels. Indeed, the personal norm of negative reciprocity (PNR) and the psychological contract violation (PCV) are hypothesized as mediating variables of such a relationship. The model is empirically tested using covariance-based structural equation modeling (CB-SEM) on a sample of 330 employees of organizations with a team-based design. PNR and PCV resulted as a full mediating variable of the relationship between TMX and instigated incivility.

Findings - Findings suggest that, by encouraging high-quality TMX, HR managers could reduce employees' willingness to instigate incivility toward colleagues other than team-members. However, focusing only on TMX may be insufficient because of the role played by individual attitudes and organizational levers such as PNR and PCV.

Originality - We enrich current works on incivility by analyzing the role of positive sentiments in minimizing deviant behaviors. Further, we investigate negative organizational phenomena through a positive lens and contribute to building a more comprehensive understanding of the factors that might produce uncivil behaviors.

Keywords TMX, Reciprocity, Incivility, Psychological Contract Violation, Social Exchange Theory

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

The detrimental and pervasive impact of incivility in organizations is well known in the literature (Gabriel *et al.*, 2018; Motro *et al.*, 2020; Reich and Hershcovis, 2015). According to Porath and Pearson (2013), 98% of workers experience uncivil behaviors at work, and about half of them report experiencing such conducts at least weekly. Examples of uncivil behaviors include talking down to others, using humiliating language, ignoring co-worker requests, and making veiled threats (Reich and Hershcovis, 2015). Further, statistics show that the share of employees who report being treated rudely at least once a month has risen by 13 percentage points since 1998 (Porath, 2017).

The cost of such a trend is weighty: as discovered by Gerbasi *et al.* (2015), de-energizing relationships, namely negative or wearing ones, have a four to seven times stronger impact on organizational performance than the positive effect of the energizing ones. Undergoing uncivil behavior has been found to yield several negative consequences. For instance, Lim *et al.* (2018) found that being exposed to incivility at work leads people to perceive hostility, which, in turn, feeds angry and withdrawal family behaviors; Pearson *et al.* (2001) shed light on both individual outcomes (e.g., enhancement of a negative affect state, increased willingness to reciprocate the uncivil behaviors) and organizational outcomes (e.g., lower trust in leaders, less productivity) resulting from experiencing incivility at work; Jawahar and Schreurs (2018) provided evidence on the relationship between supervisor incivility and citizenship performance; and, more recently, Motro *et al.* (2020) demonstrated that one team member's uncivil behaviors can be detrimental to team creativity.

Thus, while the literature on workplace incivility has posed wide attention to its consequences, the investigation of its antecedents is still scarce (see Koon and Pun, 2018; Schilpzand *et al.*, 2016). Some evidence come from Meier and Semmer (2013), who correlated work characteristics, personality, and work-related anger to workplace incivility, as well as from Trudel and Reio (2011), who examined the effect of conflict management styles on workplace incivility both experienced by the target and instigated by an employee. Given this, questions remain about what triggers the willingness to

uncivilly behave in the workplace. More importantly, there is a lack of studies on the relationship between the quality of social exchanges with co-workers and the adoption of uncivil behaviors.

In this study, we expand on this research line and speculate that workplace incivility might be significantly shaped by the team level's quality of relationships (i.e., team member exchange, TMX). To dig into this topic, we also test the mediating role that the personal norm of negative reciprocity (PNR) and the psychological contract violation (PCV) could have in the relationship between TMX and workplace incivility. Therefore, we argue that, despite the positive impact that high-quality TMX could have in discouraging instigated incivility, personal attitudes, like PNR, and individual perceptions, like PCV, could interrupt this mitigative effect.

In so doing, we aim to provide the following contributions to existing literature. First, by answering the call for a more comprehensive understanding of the factors that might produce uncivil behaviors, we make a step toward detecting possible solutions to the emergence of such behaviors (Meier and Semmer, 2013; Doshy and Wang, 2014). Second, we enrich current works analyzing the role of positive sentiments in minimizing deviant behaviors, such as uncivil ones (Itzkovich and Heilbrunn, 2016). Indeed, by investigating the importance of how negative reciprocity phenomena can be contrasted through positive relationships (Spreitzer *et al.*, 2019), we argue that, although incivility could damage social exchanges, a persisting good quality of relationships in groups may slacken the willingness to instigate incivility. Third, this study sets the ground for future research that would simultaneously analyze the combined effect of interventions on teams and organizational levels. Although teams could be an effective instrument to boost positive and productive relationships, organizational levers must not be overshadowed. In doing so, to some extent, we respond to Schilpzand's (2016) call to investigate incivility at levels different from the dyadic relationship between the two parties of the conflict. Lastly, acknowledging that prior works on uncivil behavior have mostly taken the target's perspective (Griffin, 2010), we complement existing research by focusing on the instigator side.

The article is structured as follows. In the second section, we introduce the theoretical background by reviewing TMX and Instigated Incivility studies, highlighting the importance of the PNR and the PCV in understanding incivility dynamics. In the third section, we present the conceptual framework and the hypothesized relationships among constructs. The fourth section will describe the adopted methodology and the empirical results. Finally, theoretical and managerial implications are discussed, along with directions for future research.

Theoretical Background

Team-Member Exchange Quality and Instigated Incivility

Organizational structures have been more often designed around teams (Banks *et al.*, 2014) due to their strength in developing members' skills and productivity. Teams can be defined as groups of multiple individuals who interact with each other, share goals and objectives, perform task-relevant functions, and are embedded in an organizational setting (Seers, 1989).

The exchanges that occur among teammates can assume different quality levels (Liden *et al.*, 2000). The construct of TMX quality defines "*the reciprocity between a member and his or her team with respect to the member's contribution of ideas, feedback, and assistance to other members and, in turn, the member's receipt of information, help, and recognition from other team members*" (Seers, 1989, p. 21). Farmer *et al.* (2015) describe high-quality TMX relations as those characterized by mutual respect and trust, entailing an exchange of resources beyond what is needed for task completion (Liden *et al.*, 2000). High quality in TMX heightens indebtedness feelings, increasing efforts and commitment to the relationships between peers to give back to benefactors (Farh *et al.*, 2017).

Researchers have started devoting attention to the link between TMX and deviant or negative organizational phenomena (Shkoler *et al.*, 2019). Indeed, according to the emotion-centered model (Spector and Fox, 2002), the continued exposure to emotion-arousing events elicits different kinds of behavioral responses. In particular, a situation that induces a positive state will encourage the

individual to engage in altruistic behaviors and become more involved in the workplace (Spector and Fox, 2002). It could be the case of high-quality TMX. Previous studies analyzed how civility at the workgroup level, namely the respect and concern for others' well-being (Walsh *et al.*, 2012), affects interpersonal deviance at the organizational level, namely the purposeful violation of norms to harm colleagues (Coyle-Shapiro *et al.*, 2019; Walsh *et al.*, 2012). Findings reveal that “workgroup norms for civility” can reduce interpersonal deviance (Clark and Walsh, 2016), reducing teammates' inclination to instigate incivility towards all the organizational members.

Andersson and Pearson (1999) defined incivility as a “*low-intensity deviant behavior with ambiguous intent to harm the target, in the violation of workplace norms for mutual respect*” (p. 457). Such a definition points to two main characteristics that distinguish incivility from other forms of negative organizational behaviors, namely (i) the low intensity of negative actions and (ii) their ambiguous intent to harm (Schilpzand *et al.*, 2016). The low intensity allows framing the incivility phenomenon as a milder form of interpersonal mistreatment (Cortina *et al.*, 2017). Indeed, incivility is typically characterized by rudeness and lack of courtesy and regard for others (Andersson and Pearson, 1999). Thus, uncivil behaviors might include talking down to others or not paying attention to somebody's requests (Porath and Pearson, 2013).

Several studies demonstrated that perceived incivility and instigated incivility are distinct constructs (Cortina *et al.*, 2017; Koon and Pun, 2018). According to Blau and Andersson (2005), experienced incivility refers to those situations where employees perceived themselves as victims of rude behaviors; differently, instigated incivility recalls those acts of moderate-intensity with an overt intent to harm the target. There is an increasing interest among scholars in instigated workplace incivility (Koon and Pun, 2018) since the considerable costs of incivility could be avoided by preventing the phenomenon's onset (Porath, 2017). Indeed, by studying instigated incivility, it is possible to identify the underlying causes of employees' uncivil behavior, thus detecting its drivers (Doshy and Wang, 2014).

With few exceptions (Koon and Pun, 2018; Meier and Semmer, 2013), previous studies focused on incivility's negative consequences, as lower organizational commitment, tasks, and creative performance (Cortina *et al.*, 2017). Comparably little is known about the antecedents of instigated incivility (see Miner *et al.*, 2018; Schilpzand *et al.*, 2016). From previous analyses, we can learn that lack of reciprocity, trait anger (Meier and Semmer, 2013), and job satisfaction (Koon and Pun, 2018) are possible drivers of instigated incivility. Furthermore, employees who have faced distributive injustice (Blau and Andersson, 2005) or conflictual management style (Trudel and Reio, 2011) could reciprocate the perception of such negative conditions perpetrating uncivil behaviors. However, the number of studies concerning the antecedents of instigated incivility's remains smaller than the number of studies that focus on experienced and victims of incivility (Schilpzand *et al.*, 2016).

The role of the personal norm of negative reciprocity and the psychological contract violation

Although little is known on antecedents of instigated incivility, most studies focused on perpetrators' attitudes and perceptions. The literature found significant relationships among these attitudes and perceptions, particularly PNR and PCV (Schilpzand *et al.*, 2016).

Workplace incivility is a phenomenon widely framed in the norm of reciprocity and Social Exchange Theory (SET) (Meier and Semmer, 2013; Schilpzand *et al.*, 2016). Despite being a critical concept in explaining many organizational behaviors, reciprocity has often been overlooked inside SET since partially embedded in the definition of exchange (Molm, 2010). Reciprocity is the moral norm under which people feel in some way obligated to pay back as much as one has been given (Gouldner, 1960). An important distinction made in literature discerns between positive and negative reciprocity, where the former refers to the reciprocation of positive actions, while the latter pertains to the return of harmful actions with other harmful actions. However, acknowledging that individuals who are particularly inclined to give back positive actions are also less likely to reciprocate negative behaviors (Eisenberger *et al.*, 2004), the literature distinguishes between positive and negative reciprocators: the first ones are more willing to react to positive interpersonal behaviors, while the second ones are

more sensitive to harmful practices and retaliatory actions (Perugini *et al.*, 2003). If employees are particularly prompt to react to perceived mistreatment negatively, they will likely behave uncivilly (Wu *et al.*, 2014).

A further important antecedent of instigated incivility is the employees' perception of investing more than obtained in return (Schilpzand *et al.*, 2016), which calls attention to the violation of the psychological contract. According to Rousseau (1989), the psychological contract is the set of beliefs an individual has about herself and her organization's mutual obligation. The fulfillment of these mutual expectations provokes positive behaviors that bring, for instance, to increased organizational commitment, organizational citizenship behaviors, and in-role performance (Griep and Vantilborgh, 2018). A perceived lack of reciprocity in the mutual obligation mechanism could bring to the perception of a breach inside this contract (Morrison and Robinson, 1997). The deriving intense negative emotional state leads to PCV, namely the adverse emotional response enacted toward the organization or its members (Zhao *et al.*, 2007). Several studies demonstrate that the breach and the violation of the psychological contract are likely to result in deviant workplace behaviors (Coyle-Shapiro *et al.*, 2019), such as instigated incivility (Sayers *et al.*, 2011).

Conceptual model and hypotheses development

In social exchange relationships, individuals make contributions in an open-ended stream of giving and receiving (Blau, 1964), guided not only by a *quid pro quo* basis, but also by interpersonal commitment and trust (Farh *et al.*, 2017).

High-quality TMX can be framed in the context of the positive reciprocity norm (Burmeister *et al.*, 2020; Seers *et al.*, 1995) because it generally leads to a high level of assistance and support among all organizational members, fostering organizational socialization and commitment (Banks *et al.*, 2014; Burmeister *et al.*, 2020). Team members often intervene to correct behaviors that deviate from groups' norms, which in the present study would include the positive reciprocity embedded in TMX (Walsh *et al.*, 2012). Giving and receiving favors over time enhance employees' productivity and

well-being by reinforcing the norm of positive reciprocity inside the team (Flynn, 2005). Indeed, interpersonal identities are frequently rooted in small face-to-face groups and their membership (Farmer *et al.*, 2015). Thus, the team's climate for positive reciprocal exchanges could reduce the willingness to instigate negative behaviors like uncivil ones. Building on this, we formulate our first hypothesis:

H1: TMX negatively impacts on instigated workplace incivility.

The presence of a collaborative climate inside teams is also likely to account for a significant variation in work attitudes beyond incivility (Walsh *et al.*, 2012). From a social exchange perspective, positive interactions are exchanged based on recognizing and reciprocating positive actions (Blau, 1964). For instance, studies on social support, namely the provision of sympathy, caring, and tangible assistance (Bowling *et al.*, 2004) found that reciprocity plays an important role in determining the amount of support that one receives (Chiaburu *et al.*, 2008). Specifically, analyzing the give and take mechanisms inside the social support phenomenon, scholars found that negative feelings and attitudes occur when an individual perceives that contributions do not fit benefits (Bowling *et al.*, 2004; Chiaburu *et al.* 2008). Similarly, in high-quality TMX, positive behaviors' reciprocation improves the sense of gratitude, encouraging employees to focus on received benefits (Ng, 2016). In stable and cohesive teams, members develop loyalty, trust, and gratitude (Dulac *et al.*, 2008), and employees who participate in gratitude intervention or felt respected in the workplace are discouraged in perceiving resentment and instigating mistreatment (Locklear *et al.*, 2020).

Based on this, we argue that good relationships inside teams will decrease negative attitudes, such as the PNR:

H2: TMX negatively impacts on PNR.

PCV differs from its breach (Morrison and Robinson, 1997): while the breach results from an individual's judgments and evaluations, the violation derives from an emotional reaction (Coyle-

Shapiro *et al.*, 2019). Previous studies showed that several factors, including organizational culture, climate, and relationships, are essential in maintaining the psychological contract (Coyle-Shapiro *et al.*, 2019; Rai and Agarwal, 2018). Social exchanges with colleagues are crucial for employees because workgroups encourage a sense of belonging and social approval (Bal and Vink, 2011). In this regard, high-quality team relationships might facilitate basic human needs, such as affiliation (Love and Forret, 2008). Therefore, the experience of strong relationships inside teams and high levels of TMX support psychological attachment in a work environment, increasing the level of organizational commitment (Banks *et al.*, 2014).

Furthermore, employees tend to view actions performed by other members as actions of the organization itself (Dulac *et al.*, 2008); thus, high-quality relationships between employees often lead to positive feelings toward the organization as a whole (Locklear *et al.*, 2020; Ng, 2016). According to Dulac *et al.* (2008), high-quality relationships with peers may buffer even a low psychological contract fulfillment's negative effects. In other words, employees continue to feel obligated toward the organization since team relationships become a substitute for poor psychological contract fulfillment by the organization (Bal and Vink, 2011).

Consistently with the above, we formulate our third hypothesis:

H3: TMX negatively impacts on PCV.

Given that PCV involves individuals' beliefs and subjectivity (Morrison and Robinson, 1997; Tran Huy and Takahashi, 2018), it is not surprising that scholars found significant relationships between the rise of such a negative emotional state and individual traits and attitudes (Coyle-Shapiro *et al.*, 2019).

The recognition of a breach of the psychological contract passes through two steps: (i) the perception that promises remain unfulfilled and (ii) that this unfulfillment is not reciprocal (Tran Huy and Takahashi, 2018). Thus, the personal promptness in perceiving reciprocity in the give and take mechanism becomes critical in recognizing the breach and, even more, in the rise of the consequent

negative emotional state of the violation. Because employees who have a high level of PNR are particularly inclined to reciprocate mistreatments (Perugini *et al.*, 2003), their negative emotional state is likely to be strong in perceiving a breach inside the psychological contract. Thus, we formulate the following hypothesis:

H4: PNR positively impacts on PCV.

According to Eisenberger (2004), individuals who are prompt in reciprocating favorable treatments cannot have the same willingness to reciprocate the negative ones. Negative reciprocators often consider uncivil behaviors as the right response to perceived mistreatments; therefore, the presence of a sensible PNR has been detected as a precursor of uncivil behaviors (Wu *et al.*, 2014). Indeed, PNR represents the individual willingness to harm people that, according to the individual's perspective, have in some way wronged in the social exchange processes (Chiu and Peng, 2008). Therefore, if employees of the organization are negative reciprocators (Perugini *et al.*, 2003), they will likely tend to return an unfavorable treatment with another unfavorable treatment to restore equity inside the relationship (Eisenberger *et al.*, 2004). In other words, when employees feel they are unfavorably treated, positive behaviors suffer while actions addressed to restore equilibrium increase (Mitchell and Ambrose, 2007). For these reasons, we argue that a perceived negative treatment, even unrelated to exchanges inside the team, could displace negative behaviors in case of high PNR. As a result, we formulate our fifth hypothesis:

H5: PNR positively impacts instigated incivility.

Research on negative organizational phenomena shows that stressful conditions are not sufficient to lead to employees' adverse reactions; it is essential that they perceive them as stressful (Spector and Fox, 2002). Thus, individual perceptions of negative phenomena elicit negative feelings and responses (Greco *et al.*, 2019).

In the increasing mechanism of negative responses to negative events, individuals could decide to retaliate against individuals other than the instigators (Deng *et al.*, 2018; Mitchell and Ambrose, 2007). For this reason, PCV may provoke negative behaviors, like incivility, toward both the organization and its members (Chiu and Peng, 2008). According to the displaced aggression theory (Allen *et al.*, 2018), when an employee is the victim of mistreatments, he/she could retaliate to an individual other than the harm-doer. Previous research demonstrated relationships between PCV and the rise of phenomena like reduced job satisfaction, organizational commitment, citizenship, and in-role performance (Zhao *et al.*, 2007). However, PCV could provoke not only a reduction of positive organizational behaviors but also an increase of negative phenomena, like incivility (Sayers *et al.*, 2011). More in detail, existing literature found support for the relationships between job dissatisfaction and unhappiness with job conditions and the instigation of incivility toward colleagues (Koon and Pun, 2018). Based on these considerations, we expect the following:

H6: PCV positively impacts on instigated incivility.

High levels of a negative attitude, such as PNR, and the simultaneous presence of PCV, are strongly related to negative reactions toward organizational members (Chiu and Peng, 2008; Itzkovich and Heilbrunn, 2016). Although TMX could directly reduce the willingness to instigate incivility, it could not be enough when there is the simultaneous presence of high individuals' PNR and PCV perception. Indeed, high-quality relationships with peers may buffer the perception of psychological contract unfulfillment (Dulac *et al.*, 2008); however, the attitude to negatively react toward perceived mistreatment could reduce this effect at least toward colleagues other than team-members.

Based on the emotion-centered model of workplace behaviors, scholars have demonstrated that employees who feel betrayed develop negative emotions, which, in turn, lead to an increased propensity to reciprocate with negative behaviors (Spector and Fox, 2002). Therefore, if employees perceive a violation of their psychological contract and are negative reciprocators, displaced uncivil behaviors will be more likely (Perugini *et al.*, 2003).

For this reason, we hypothesize that PNR and PCV could mediate the relationship between TMX and instigated incivility. Hence:

H7: PNR and PCV significantly mediate the relationship between TMX and instigated incivility.

Insert Figure 1 here

Research Methodology

Sampling

Our sample includes employees of four organizations located in Italy that operate in different industries. Several organizational behaviors and HRM authors have stressed that heterogeneous samples allow researchers to avoid contextual constraints (Härtel and O'Connor, 2014). We selected medium/large organizations with a range of employees that goes from 50 to 400. The four organizations that took part in the study are: (1) a prosecutor's office, (2) a credit institute, (3) a pharmaceutical industry, and (4) a large-scale distribution company. We developed a five-page questionnaire with 37 items (see Appendix A with the complete questionnaire). Measures initially developed in English were translated into Italian using the translation/back-translation procedure (Yang *et al.*, 2011). In order to decrease the social desirability bias (Podsakoff *et al.*, 2003), the cover letter emphasized that participation was anonymous, answers were neither right nor wrong, no reward was provided, and data managed with maximum confidentiality. In all four organizations, directors and administrators directly collaborated in organizing the administration of the survey. The participation of top management has been crucial in obtaining a satisfactory response rate. For each organization, we first had a meeting with the board to better evaluate situational constraints that could affect the research results. Board and human resources management e-mailed to 543 employees an electronic link and a cover letter that explained the research purpose. After discarding incomplete or

incorrect questionnaires, we obtained a valid sample of 330 respondents (response rate = 61%). Respondents averaged about 46 years old; most were women (59%), and the average work experience is 20 years.

Measures

To measure our variables, we adopted scales validated in previous studies and used a five-point Likert-type scale (1 = “strongly disagree” to 5 = “strongly agree”) to capture each measure. All the items used in the survey are reported in Appendix A.

TMX quality was measured by the scale developed by Seers *et al.* (1995), while PNR’s scale was taken by the personal norm of reciprocity questionnaire (Perugini *et al.*, 2003). Robinson and Morrison (2000) provided the scale used to measure PCV; however, of the nine items of the survey, we considered the four questions related to PCV. Finally, instigated incivility was measured using the instrument developed by Blau and Andersson (2005).

Analysis and Results

Preliminary analyses

Table 1 reports the scales’ means, reliability values, and zero-order correlations among variables.

Insert Table 1 here

As shown in Table 1, all the Cronbach’s Alpha values were satisfactory (>0.70) and all variables showed significant Pearson’s *r* values, indicating positive and negative correlations between variables. As expected, PNR showed the strongest positive correlation of the model with PCV

($r=+0.323$; $p<0.001$), which in turn was highly correlated with instigated incivility ($r=+0.240$; $p<0.001$). Instead, PCV showed the strongest negative correlation with TMX ($r=-0.223$; $p<0.001$).

Measurement model

To conduct the first step of covariance-based structural equation modeling (CB-SEM), we ran a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) using AMOS v.23. The maximum likelihood of AMOS was used to estimate the psychometric properties of the hypothesized four-construct model: TMX, PNR, PCV, and instigated incivility. All factor loadings between indicators and latent variables were significant ($p<0.01$). The CFA resulted in satisfactory fitting indexes, both absolute: $\chi^2/df=1.403$; RMSEA=0.037; GFI=0.906, and relative: CFI=0.964; IFI=0.964; TLI=0.957. As shown in Table 1, all variables showed acceptable Composite Reliability (CR) values ($> .06$; Bagozzi and Yi, 1988), ranging from 0.80 (TMX) to 0.94 (Instigated Incivility). The analysis also showed that the square roots of all constructs' AVEs are greater than the correlations reported in Table 1 (Fornell and Larcker, 1981), thus indicating acceptable discriminant validity.

Finally, we assessed the common method bias (CMB) following the pertinent guidelines (Podsakoff *et al.*, 2003): first, Harman's one-factor test did not identify a single general factor accounting for the majority of the total variance (which was equal to 18.10%); second, we used the "one-factor model" procedure, comparing our hypothesized model with a model loading all items into a single common method factor. Our model showed highly superior fitting indexes concerning the one-factor model, which was also statistically different from ours. Thus, CMB is unlikely to represent a threat to our study.

Hypotheses testing

AMOS (v.23) was used to conduct the second step of our CB-SEM analysis to empirically and simultaneously test our model's hypothesized path coefficients. Thus, we proceeded with the assessment of the double mediation analysis. The results are illustrated in Figure 2.

Insert Figure 2 here

To test PNR and PCV's mediating effect on the relationship between TMX and instigated incivility, we followed Baron and Kenny's (1986) four-step procedure. First, the independent variable (TMX) has to predict the dependent variable (instigated incivility) significantly. Our statistical analysis showed that TMX had a significant and negative influence on instigated incivility ($\beta=-0.16$; $p<0.01$); thus, confirming *H1*. Second, the independent variable has to be a significant predictor of the mediating variables (PNR and PCV). TMX significantly and negatively impacted PNR ($\beta=-0.12$; $p<0.05$). Hence, our *H2* is confirmed. Similarly, TMX had a negative and significant impact on PCV ($\beta=-0.19$; $p<0.01$), giving statistical support to *H3*. Next, the mediating variables need to be significantly related to one another. Since PNR had a significant and positive relationship with PCV ($\beta=+0.30$; $p<0.01$), *H4* was also supported. Finally, the mediating variables need to significantly impact the dependent variable, thus reducing or eliminating the original path. Our results indicated that PNR significantly and positively impacted instigated incivility ($\beta=+0.20$; $p<0.01$); hence our *H5* is confirmed. Similarly, PCV had a significant and positive relationship with instigated incivility ($\beta=+0.145$ $p<0.01$), giving statistical support to *H6*. As a result, the effect of TMX on instigated incivility became non-significant ($\beta=-0.10$; $p>0.05$) thanks to the effect of PNR and PCV, resulting in a full mediation effect. Hence, *H7* is supported by the analysis.

Discussion

Despite the well-known detrimental effect of incivility (Porath and Pearson, 2013) and the plethora of studies that explain the dynamics of such a phenomenon (Miner *et al.*, 2018), little is still known about its drivers (Koon and Pun, 2018). Furthermore, research on the topic lacks empirical and

theoretical attention on how incivility occurs at different levels, e.g., groups, teams, or the whole organization (Miner *et al.*, 2018).

We tried to fill this gap by replying to Spreitzer's (2019) call for new research avenues that investigate negative organizational phenomena through a positive lens. To do so, we analyzed the effect that the quality of exchanges inside teams might have on employees' willingness to instigate incivility towards the whole organization's colleagues.

The empirical analysis showed that high-quality exchanges in teams could significantly influence instigated workplace incivility. More in detail, the presence of high-quality TMX can reduce negative attitudes, i.e., the PNR, and emotional states, as PCV. However, the simultaneous presence of high PNR levels and a strong perception of PCV can inhibit the positive effect of TMX on instigated incivility. Based on these results, we stress that effective organizational management should not underestimate these levers' effects to mitigate incivility in the workplace.

Theoretical implications

Contrary to the dominant research focused on incivility outcomes or the inhibition of its negative drivers (Schilpzand *et al.*, 2016), we studied possible deterrents to the instigation of incivility. More in detail, we tried to analyze how to contrast such a negative phenomenon through a positive lens (Spreitzer *et al.*, 2019).

Although previous studies already analyzed incivility using SET and the personal norm of reciprocity, little is known about how high-quality exchanges could influence negative behaviors (Itzkovich and Heilbrunn, 2016). By analyzing exchanges inside teams, we investigated how team-member relationships, rather than dyadic relationships, could affect organizational incivility. Findings reveal that TMX is an important predictor of instigated workplace incivility. Indeed, according to the SET and the norm of reciprocity, a social exchange involves a series of interdependent actions (Blau, 1964) that, under certain circumstances, have the potential to develop high-quality relationships (Cropanzano *et al.*, 2017). Therefore, high-quality exchanges and relationships inside teams can

reduce negative behaviors toward employees of the whole organization. However, in order for TMX to generate positive effects on the entire organization, it is crucial to consider team level and organizational level simultaneously. Indeed, our theoretical model highlights how interventions just at the team level are insufficient to avoid negative organizational phenomena. Our framework demonstrates that, although high-quality relationships could be a deterrent to the rise of incivility inside the organization, the attention to the organizational levers must never fail. Indeed, the presence of negative personal attitudes and perceptions could always destroy the positive effect of good team-member exchanges.

We also contribute to reciprocity literature giving more insight on how PNR could inhibit the positive effects of TMX for the organization. As an attitude, PNR could be reduced through high-quality continuative exchanges with colleagues of the same team. Indeed, positive behaviors' reciprocation encourages employees to focus on received benefits generating obligations and membership (Locklear *et al.*, 2020). However, high levels of PNR could always negatively impact employees' organizational behaviors other than team-members. Thus, attitudes, like PNR, remain important antecedents of instigated incivility.

Finally, we contribute to TMX literature by showing how high-quality TMX positively affects negative personal attitudes, i.e., PNR, emotional states like PCV, and the instigation of rude behaviors as incivility. Indeed, TMX results as an important lever to reduce negative phenomena inside the organization.

Practical implications

Our study offers several practical implications for managers, particularly HR managers, who aim to mitigate incivility or prevent it inside the organization. Firstly, they should focus not only on experienced incivility but also on the instigated one. Although incivility is ambiguous in its intent to harm, there may be situations where the intent to harm is ambiguous just to the target and quite clear to the instigator (Miner *et al.*, 2018). Therefore, to prevent incivility, it is important to discourage

behaviors that could become the start of widespread incivility in the workplace. To deter instigated incivility, traditional disincentives like a zero-tolerance policy for incivility and instigator punishment (Abubakar *et al.*, 2018; Andersson and Pearson, 1999) could not be sufficient.

For this reason, managers should consider the importance of relationships' dynamics inside teams. By encouraging good team exchanges, employees' willingness to instigate incivility toward colleagues other than team-members might be reduced. Furthermore, high-quality TMX could mitigate the individuals' attitude to negatively reciprocate what they received and the perception of poor relationships toward the organization. To boost high-quality TMX, managers could establish a resource-rich environment for employees, strengthening team-members relationships. Instilling in employees' minds that they can create and co-create resources may involve exchanged resources already in use by different actors (Spreitzer *et al.*, 2019). Therefore, the perception of a resource-rich environment can thrive good relationships that overflow teams' borders, decrementing the willingness to instigate incivility towards colleagues.

However, focusing only on team-members dynamics may not be enough. Indeed, high-quality TMX does not automatically lead to good relationships inside the organization. Managers should not underestimate those organizational levers that can mitigate negative behaviors as the instigation of incivility. In this sense, our study highlighted the importance of two negative constructs: PNR and PCV.

To decrease the detrimental impact that negative reciprocity attitude has on the organization, managers have not only to create general positive conditions for the organization but also customize their intervention based on employees' personalities. One path could be to reduce employees' negative reciprocity attitude, demonstrating, for example, that negative responses are an unsuccessful strategy and encouraging other forms of reaction to negative behaviors like mediation, communication, or negotiation. Since research demonstrates that an immediate and frequent reaction between parties involved in negative reciprocity decreases the likelihood of displaced revenge (Geddes *et al.*, 2020; Greco *et al.*, 2019), immediate clarification could also reduce the intense

negative emotional state resulting from PCV. As a consequence, the instigation of incivility would be less likely.

Limitations and future researches

Our survey-based approach may have influenced the measurement accuracy. Measures were self-reported, which could raise concerns about common method variance (Podsakoff *et al.*, 2003); however, we tried to reduce this bias's impact by ensuring the confidentiality of responses.

Furthermore, our cross-sectional data do not allow to understand changes in the target population's characteristics. Future researches could test the hypotheses using longitudinal data. Our framework could also be tested through qualitative methods to time-varying and progressive aspects of the interaction between team-members relationships and instigation of incivility. Furthermore, network analyses could test analyzed relationships considering how organizational context could affect instigated incivility.

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