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# Work Ethic and Work Outcomes in an Expanded Criterion Domain

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# Work Ethic and Work Outcomes in an Expanded Criterion Domain

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## **Work Ethic and Work Outcomes in an Expanded Criterion Domain**

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### **Introduction**

Given the “changing nature of work” in organizations today (Burke & Ng, 2006; Cooper, 1999; Howard, 1995; Ilgen & Pulakos, 1999), where work is characterized by less stability and a need for greater flexibility, work ethic should play an increasingly important role in the job performance of employees. Because organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) is more discretionary and less likely to be rewarded and punished than in-role task performance (Organ, Podsakoff, & MacKenzie, 2006), employees who fundamentally value work itself rather than the extrinsic rewards that come from it (i.e., those higher in work ethic) should be more likely to engage in citizenship behavior. At the same time, with the ambiguous and less predictable nature of work and increased employee autonomy and flexibility, the potential for employees to engage in counterproductive work behavior (CWB) remains a concern. The purpose of this study was to investigate relationships between dimensions of work ethic and dimensions of OCB and CWB.

### **Literature Overview**

Work ethic can be formally defined as an individual difference construct characterized by “a set of beliefs and attitudes reflecting the fundamental value of work” (Meriac, Woehr, & Banister, 2010; Miller, Woehr, & Hudspeth, 2002). Research on work ethic and contextual performance has demonstrated that work ethic dimensions are positively related to task performance (Miller et al., 2002) and helping behavior (Ryan, 2002). However, research on the relationships between work ethic and sub-dimensions of OCB has been limited, and much less information exists on the relationship between work ethic dimensions and CWB. OCB is associated with several desirable work outcomes for individuals, including greater rewards, lower turnover intentions, and reduced absenteeism (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Paine, & Bacharach, 2000). CWB includes acts of aggression, hostility, sabotage, and theft and withdrawal; and research has demonstrated that CWB has undesirable consequences for organizations and individuals within them (Sackett, 2002).

### **Methodology**

Survey data were collected from 233 matched pairs of employed individuals and their work supervisors. Participants were recruited from leadership development courses in business, traditional MBA, and executive MBA programs at a university in the southeastern United States, and were all employed at the time of data collection. Participants represented diverse occupations with respect to job levels and industries. Participants completed the Multidimensional Work Ethic Inventory–Short Form (MWEP-SF) (Meriac, Woehr, Gorman, & Thomas, 2013), and participants’ managers completed ratings of OCB and CWB. Due to the multivariate nature of the performance outcomes in this study, model fitting path analysis was conducted using AMOS 23 (SPSS, 2015). Also, because the criteria were not normally distributed, we used bootstrapping instead of parametric significance tests. Finally, we conducted a multivariate relative weights analysis to

examine the proportion of variance each work ethic dimension explained in the multivariate criterion space.

### Results and Implications

The work ethic dimension of centrality of work was positively related to both dimensions of OCB (i.e., OCB-I and OCB-O), and the work ethic dimension of morality/ethics was negatively related to one of the dimensions of CWB (CWB-I). Morality/ethics explained the largest proportion of variance in the criterion space ( $R_{\text{aw}} = .048$ ;  $R_{\text{RW}} = .293$ ), followed by leisure ( $R_{\text{aw}} = .035$ ;  $R_{\text{RW}} = .215$ ), centrality of work ( $R_{\text{aw}} = .034$ ;  $R_{\text{RW}} = .207$ ), wasted time ( $R_{\text{aw}} = .034$ ;  $R_{\text{RW}} = .204$ ), and self-reliance ( $R_{\text{aw}} = .013$ ;  $R_{\text{RW}} = .081$ ). These findings provide empirical support for the notion that work ethic is indeed related to contextual performance. This study also highlights the importance of the multidimensional nature of work ethic, in that all dimensions were not related to outcomes uniformly. Moreover, our findings that dimensions of work ethic differentially predict OCB and CWB provide further evidence of the independence of these contextual performance constructs and provide additional support for the expanded criterion view.

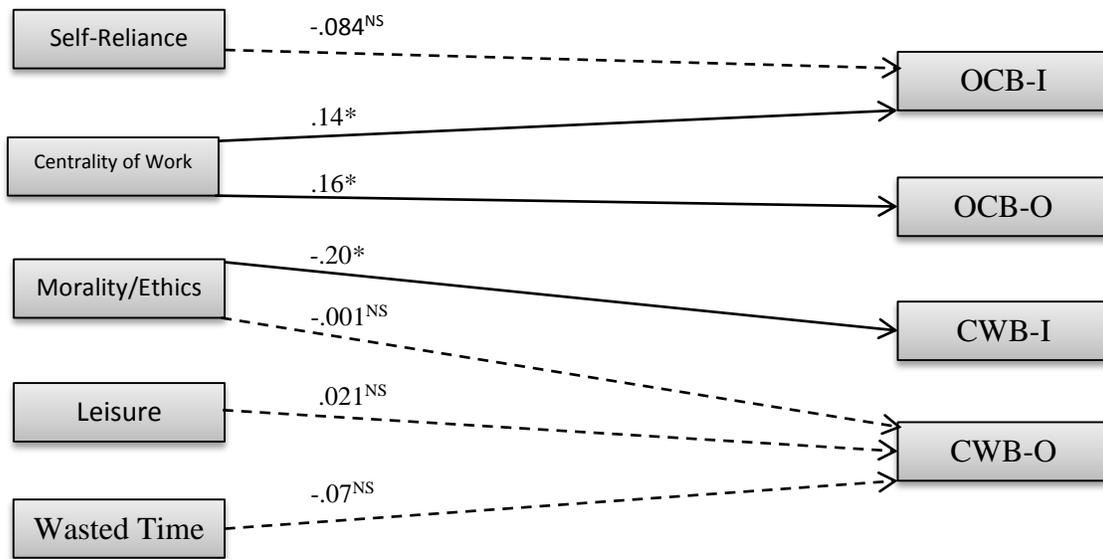


Figure 1. Relationships among work ethic dimensions and contextual performance. Standardized parameter estimates included in figure. \*  $p < .05$ .

### Conclusion

Given the results of our study, work ethic may hold promise in personnel selection contexts, especially considering that the MWEP-SF is a relatively short measure that can be efficiently administered in organizational contexts. Additional future directions should involve the study of work ethic outcomes in a longitudinal design, and our findings should be replicated in other samples. Overall, however, this study's results underscore the relevance of work ethic in the prediction of OCB and CWB. If employers are interested in increasing OCB and decreasing CWB, the work ethic construct is relevant for consideration in such applications. Given the importance

of the expanded criterion domain in modern work environments, work ethic remains an important individual difference related to positive and negative work outcomes.

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