

Workplace Civility: From Implicit Self-Enhancement to Explicit Organizational Optimization

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Abstract

Workplace civility is a proactive behavior that, within an organizational culture, conveys politeness and respect based on social and organizational role obligations. It is a behavior that demands self-control inwardly while advocating the conveyance of respect outwardly, and it holds positive significance for the shaping of individual character, the improvement of interpersonal relationships within organizations, and the cultivation of a civilized atmosphere. In relationships such as employee-employee, leader-subordinate, and employee-customer, workplace civility plays a role in enhancing collegiality, promoting cooperation, strengthening leadership, building trust, and improving performance. Future research should further clarify the relationship between workplace civility and incivility, employ a dynamic perspective to investigate the mechanisms of their occurrence, development, and perception, as well as address questions such as whether these two behaviors can transform into each other.

Full Text

Workplace Civility: From Implicit Self-Enhancement to Explicit Organizational Optimization

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Abstract

Workplace civility is a proactive behavior that conveys politeness and respect based on social and organizational role obligations within an organizational culture. It demands self-control inwardly while advocating respect outwardly, holding positive significance for individual character development, interpersonal

relationship improvement, and civilized atmosphere cultivation. In employee-employee, leader-subordinate, and employee-customer relationships, workplace civility enhances collegial friendship, promotes cooperation, strengthens leadership, builds trust, and improves performance. Future research should clarify the relationship between workplace civility and incivility, employ dynamic perspectives to investigate their occurrence, development, and perception mechanisms, and explore whether these behaviors can transform into each other.

Keywords: workplace civility; self-control; respect; promotion; optimization

1. Problem Statement

In recent years, under the influence of positive psychology, the research focus of occupational health psychology has shifted from repairing what is broken to cultivating the best, and from remedying the negative consequences of work stress to enhancing personal resources and well-being through positive psychological interventions (Meyers, Van Woerkom, & Bakker, 2013).

Workplace civility initially attracted researchers' attention as an effective intervention to mitigate the negative effects of workplace incivility. For example, the CREW (Civility, Respect, and Engagement in the Workforce) intervention reduced supervisors' uncivil behaviors and improved their civility perceptions and work attitudes (such as commitment and self-efficacy) (Spence Laschinger, Leiter, Day, Oore, & Mackinnon, 2012). Some researchers operationalized workplace civility as an organizational climate—civility climate: employees' perceptions of supportive and respectful behavioral norms among work group members, or as an organizational norm—civility norm: the extent to which employees treat each other respectfully and avoid rudeness (Walsh et al., 2012). While these studies demonstrated civility's improving effects on organizations, they treated civility as an organizational-level concept or a tool to reduce incivility's negative impact, rather than as an independent individual behavior concept. This has hindered the academic development of workplace civility and created limitations in incivility research. Workplace civility and incivility are closely connected concepts, and their research complements each other. In recent years, incivility research has been confined to Andersson and Pearson's (1999) spiraling escalation metaphor, urgently needing new concepts, hypotheses, and theories to bring vitality and breakthrough (Cortina, Kabat-Farr, Magley, & Nelson, 2017).

As an important positive behavior, workplace civility must be studied as an independent behavioral concept. Meanwhile, as the primary setting for individual development and social activities, organizations represent a crucial context for investigating individual positive dynamics and states (Fredrickson & Dutton, 2008). Thus, research on workplace civility is not only an important component of positive organizational scholarship but also explores the vitality of individuals and collectives, providing foundations for organizational policy-making and employee practice. The absence of civility is a widespread concern in contem-

porary society (Fritz, 2013), and without clear understanding of civil behavior, citizens find it difficult to practice it. Therefore, questions such as what constitutes civil behavior, what characteristics civility possesses, how it differs from other positive behaviors, and what impacts it has urgently require researchers' answers and explanations.

Based on a review of relevant literature on workplace civility, this paper explores the nature of workplace civility, provides a clearer definition, and addresses: Is workplace civility positive or neutral? What are its connections and distinctions with workplace incivility and organizational citizenship behavior? What are the mechanisms of workplace civility's occurrence and its effects on individuals and organizations? And what approaches does it offer for handling relationships among colleagues, between leaders and subordinates, and between employees and customers?

2. The Connotation of Workplace Civility

Civility was originally closely associated with citizenship and belonged only to a select few (Schaefer, 2015), leading some scholars to argue that civility is a source of power—a widely accepted strategy for gaining social advantage (Andersson & Pearson, 1999). Those in authority define civility and use it to suppress unwelcome speech or minority opinions, thereby protecting their own interests (Flaherty, 2014). However, “civility” does not equal “hegemonic civility.” While civility serves the common good of humanity, hegemonic civility is intimately tied to power, meaning the suppression of opposing views to maintain an oppressive status quo (Fritz, 2013). In contemporary society where equality of identity and status is gradually being realized, civility has shed the shadow of “hegemony,” and its definition should be decoupled from power as much as possible, reflecting more humanity and obligation. Throughout its evolution, civility has embodied not only the rights accompanying status but also the obligations. Civility should not be merely instrumental or functional; it also carries moral influence (Andersson & Pearson, 1999). Linguistically, civility is grouped with other honorific terms such as politeness, obligation, and cultivation. Schaefer (2015) argues that responsibility and civility should be expressed together: the responsibility of civility. Particularly in the workplace, civility is inseparable from responsibility and obligation, encompassing duties that accompany organizational commitment and requiring individuals to make efforts to maintain the collective life of organizational members.

2.1 Definition and Nature of Workplace Civility

Existing definitions of civil behavior are generally vague and lack operational clarity (see Table 1 for details), stemming from two reasons: (1) The nature of civil behavior remains undetermined. (2) Civil behavior itself is quite subtle and not easily noticeable. For actors, they may simply be “doing the right thing” without intending to benefit targets or the organization (Andersson & Pearson, 1999). For targets or observers, the positive intent of civil behavior is

not obvious and fails to make a strong impression—for instance, someone holding an elevator for you, attentively listening to your presentation in a meeting, or ending an email with “best wishes.” Workplace civility includes the respectful and polite behaviors that most of us desire in work environments: respecting mutual interests, teamwork, fairly resolving conflicts, valuing individual differences (Osatuke, Moore, Ward, Dyrenforth, & Belton, 2009), listening, paying attention, mutual tolerance and empathy, offering praise, speaking kindly, respecting others’ time, and helping (rather than criticizing/blaming) others when problems arise (Fritz, 2013). Existing definitions collectively reveal several important characteristics of workplace civility: showing respect, politeness, and concern for others.

Table 1: Summary of Workplace Civility Definitions

Workplace Civility Definition	Nature	Researcher & Year
Behavior that respects others’ dignity, respects others’ feelings, and maintains mutually respectful organizational norms.	Neutral	Carter, 1998
A behavior that is polite and caring to others within workplace respect behavioral norms.	Neutral	Andersson & Pearson, 1999
Behavior that helps maintain mutually respectful norms at work; it includes behaviors that are the foundation for positive connection with others, relationship building, and empathy.	Neutral	Pearson, Andersson, & Porath, 2000
Civility assumes a consciousness beyond self and requires conveying respect and concern for others’ well-being.	Positive	Sypher, 2004
Civil behavior is acting positively as a group citizen, enabling individual investment in capacities beneficial to self and collective.	Positive	Marini, 2007
Behavior that respects others, shows basic courtesy, and creates positive learning and work environments.	Positive	Gilroy, 2008
Civility requires people to speak in respectful, responsible, restrained, and principled ways, avoiding offensive, rude, demeaning, and threatening ways.	Neutral	Gill & Sypher, 2009
Polite and considerate workplace behavior within workgroups.	Neutral	Osatuke et al., 2009

Workplace Civility Definition	Nature	Researcher & Year
Workplace civility refers to considering others in interpersonal relationships.	Positive	Ferriss, 2010
Workplace civility is a behavior that helps maintain mutually respectful norms at work, containing factors beyond good attitudes and etiquette.	Positive	Walsh et al., 2012
Professional civil behavior is a communicative virtue and practical wisdom, part of professionalism.	Positive	Fritz, 2013
Workplace civility contains respect, dignity, politeness, and pleasantness.	Positive	Porath, Gerbasi, & Schorch, 2015
Civility contains those respectful, polite behaviors that most people desire at work.	Neutral	Cortina et al., 2017

The primary characteristic of workplace civility is conveying politeness and respect (Leiter, Spence Laschinger, Day, & Oore, 2011). For example, an American university defines workplace civility as “behavior that respects others, shows basic courtesy, and creates a positive learning and work environment” (Gilroy, 2008). Von Bergen and Collie (2013) argue that respecting others is an important element of civil behavior, reflecting a public environment of seeking common ground while reserving differences: treating others with respect and dignity without necessarily agreeing with or accepting their values. As Andersson and Pearson (1999) described, civility in the business realm manifests as “formal yet friendly, measured yet polite.” Modern workplaces are increasingly characterized by diversity, with substantial differences among individuals in ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, work styles, life experiences, thinking patterns, and business processes (Potterton, 2018; Periard et al., 2018). This requires employees to tolerate, respect, listen, and avoid harshness, conflict, and personal attacks when discussing different viewpoints, ensuring positive interactions (Montalvo, 2013).

Second, workplace civility is grounded in the fulfillment of social role obligations. Professional roles provide organizational members with behavioral constraints and organizationally expected behavioral guidelines, representing an important element of professional virtue (Fritz, 2011; Ferriss, 2010). An individual’s social role comprises two aspects: citizen of society and employee of the organization. As a citizen, individuals should abide by social norms and prioritize the welfare of society as the supreme principle of action (Fritz, 2013). Social civil behavior is a goal that every citizen strives for and a foundational element of civic life, encompassing five dimensions: ideals and beliefs, patriotic sentiment, moral character, knowledge and insight, and lifestyle (Li Yihong & Qiu Huayu, 2019). As an employee, an individual’s primary task is to complete work assignments under organizational guidelines. Civility is the highest-rated personal value in the workplace (Giraldi & Ikeda, 2008), and workplace civility aims to create a

work environment that ensures work practices proceed with minimal interference (Donnelly, 2008; Fritz, 2013). Work tasks among organizational members are interrelated, and fulfilling one's own responsibilities is key to maintaining normal organizational production and relationship functioning. When an employee fails to meet personal task standards, it delays the entire work group's progress and harms colleagues' interests (for example, colleagues doing extra work to make up for the delay), undermining interpersonal justice and organizational production goals, and thus cannot be considered civil.

For leaders or managers, civil behavior is based on clear task delegation and accountability for results. Meanwhile, unlike the universality of social civil behavior, workplace civility is a behavioral goal for all members within a given organization. Fritz (2013) emphasized the fluid and situational nature of civility. The connotation of workplace civility and the specific manifestations of civil behavior vary according to organizational culture and industry nature. For instance, the healthcare industry has high ethical requirements, where civility means healthcare professionals treating patients' health and safety as responsibly as their own and maintaining and enhancing professional skills (Clark & Kenski, 2017). For fast-paced internet companies, civility may focus more on timely information feedback and work efficiency.

Finally, workplace civility is a proactive behavior. Proactive behavior refers to anticipatory actions employees take to influence or change themselves or their work environment (Belschak & Den Hartog, 2010), representing a positive behavior. Workplace civility conveys a commitment to jointly solving life problems (Fritz, 2013): employees voluntarily make sacrifices for collective life and establish enforceable standards that limit freedom, enabling the larger group representing all members to accomplish its tasks. Civil behavior is not conflict-avoidance oriented but other-oriented—maintaining decency in interpersonal relationships, valuing and being considerate of others (Wilkins, Caldarella, Crook-Lyon, & Young, 2010). Individuals consciously consider others' interests, stand in others' shoes, and reflect on how their own behavioral styles might make others feel (Gilroy, 2008), while seeking personal career development and simultaneously safeguarding team and organizational interests. Thus, workplace civility emphasizes proactive maintenance—maintaining the organization's healthy development and preserving good relationships among colleagues—reflecting respect for both others' interests and collective interests, making it a proactive behavior.

Based on these characteristics, we propose that workplace civility is a proactive behavior that conveys politeness and respect based on social and organizational role obligations within an organizational culture.

2.2 Relationships with Incivility and Positive Organizational Behavior

Andersson and Pearson (1999) defined incivility as the antonym of civility, indicating many commonalities between them. In the two-dimensional organiza-

tional behavior spectrum constructed by Cortina et al. (2017) using intensity, ambiguity, and impact on performance as criteria, workplace civility and incivility occupy remarkably similar positions: low intensity, high ambiguity, and minimal impact on performance. Frequency, intensity, and other factors are basic criteria in organizational behavior research for measuring individual violation and harm (Kent & Muurlink, 2014). However, because civil interaction is a tacit need (Andersson & Pearson, 1999), these surface features cannot fully reveal the mechanisms of workplace (in)civility. Regardless of a behavior's purpose, intensity, subtlety, or manifestation, once the behavior target feels disrespected, the line of social decency has been crossed. Therefore, a common challenge facing workplace civility and incivility research is that the focus should not be on external manifestations or surface features but on individual perception. Meanwhile, researchers have proposed a new dimension in defining workplace (in)civility—invisibility—meaning behaviors are more often expressed in non-contact forms such as verbal communication, facial expressions, posture, and spatial usage (Kent & Muurlink, 2014).

Workplace civility and incivility share similar modes of operation, spreading through organizations like infectious diseases, constantly interacting and changing not only among behavior participants but also influencing bystanders' behaviors through interpersonal justice or emotional contagion (Kent & Muurlink, 2014; Leiter, 2013). Workplace (in)civility is not binary; participants' roles are fluid, with behavior actors quickly becoming behavior recipients. Therefore, factors such as power and identity of behavior participants significantly influence the behavior, warranting a network analysis perspective to explore new empirical questions (Cortina et al., 2017). Meanwhile, the impact of workplace (in)civility is less manifested at explicit levels such as organizational performance and more at implicit levels, relating to individuals' comfort and well-being in the organization and directly affecting organizational culture (Potterton, 2018; Fritz, 2013).

Compared with positive behaviors such as helping behavior, interpersonal organizational citizenship behavior, social support, and positive deviance, workplace civility exhibits lower positivity, higher ambiguity, and minimal performance enhancement effects (Cortina et al., 2017). For recipients, civil behavior's positivity is relatively low and not easily noticeable; individuals may not have strong positive experiences from single instances of civil behavior. However, the advantage of civil behavior lies in its subtle, silent influence that imperceptibly improves interpersonal relationships and affects organizational climate. In terms of intention, organizational citizenship behavior emphasizes spontaneity beyond role obligations and benefit to the organization (Livi, Theodorou, Rullo, Cinque, & Alessandri, 2018), while helping behavior and social support in organizations reflect more emotional connection and reciprocity (Ford, Wang, Jin, & Eisenberger, 2018). In comparison, workplace civility has a lower degree of positivity; it does not necessarily bring substantive help or visible benefits to behavior recipients or the organization but makes people feel comfortable and optimizes organizational functioning. Meanwhile, the starting point of civil be-

havior is consideration for the behavior recipient; it is not a superficial behavior, distinguishing it from ingratiating behavior, and its multi-layered connotation elevates it above the work value of simply “caring for others” (Porath et al., 2015).

3. Mechanisms and Positive Effects of Workplace Civility

Workplace civility is a behavior that demands self-control inwardly while advocating the conveyance of respect outwardly. For individuals, workplace civility reflects a positive internal drive that requires restraining negative emotions and controlling behavioral patterns (Ferriss, 2010). For others, workplace civility conveys politeness, respect, and consideration, making others feel comfortable. Therefore, workplace civility is a behavior where internal enhancement and external optimization complement each other. Based on this logical framework, this paper synthesizes existing research to map the positive effects of workplace civility (see Figure 1 [Figure 1: see original paper]).

3.1 Mechanisms of Workplace Civility

Workplace civility requires employees to maintain positive behavioral patterns, which demands strong self-control. Although workplace civility is other-oriented, its motivation is primarily self-improvement (Wilkins et al., 2010). Individuals direct their behavior toward a specific goal: completing their organizational work tasks well and making others feel comfortable, thereby enhancing their sense of autonomy and fostering an upward drive. Meanwhile, successfully achieving personal goals can create a sense of accomplishment, making individuals feel capable, that their behavior is meaningful, and gaining enhanced well-being (Genugten, Dusseldorp, Massey, & Empelen, 2017). Thus, the core of workplace civility lies in individuals’ self-mastery; it helps them maintain rationality, suppress negative emotions, and enhance their ability to cope with setbacks when facing complex work affairs and intricate interpersonal interactions. Fredrickson and Dutton (2008) argue that positive cognitive and behavioral patterns can accumulate to form lasting personal resources that help people live better lives in the future. Therefore, individuals can develop positive behavioral patterns through accumulated civil practices, improve professional competence and moral standards, and achieve self-promotion.

However, civil behavior is not necessarily enacted by “good soldiers” in the workplace; it may also come from “good actors.” Organizational members’ intentions for engaging in civil behavior may not only be about doing the right thing or having high moral standards but could also stem from impression management motives. Impression management motivation prompts employees to focus their attention and compassion on aspects beneficial to others or the organization and avoid risky behaviors (Donia, Johns, & Raja, 2016). It may not be entirely selfless but is still proactive and lacks harmful intent. In such cases, civil behavior has a certain instrumental nature, becoming a way to shape a positive

personal image and obtain corresponding benefits while also playing a positive role in organizational development.

There is also a type of civil behavior motivated by avoidance—a compromise approach for employees facing pressure or power. For instance, in a company decision where most people support a certain viewpoint, others may refrain from expressing their true thoughts to avoid conveying uncivil tendencies or triggering conflict by opposing that viewpoint. Such civility can only achieve superficial harmony, hindering freedom of speech and collision of ideas. Researchers view this situation as the “dark side of civility” (Cortina et al., 2017). This perspective treats workplace civility entirely as a tool, where civility is not for the good of the organization/society but a superficial behavior displayed to avoid conflict. Its fundamental motivation is self-preservation at the expense of organizational interests. This situation may not belong to civil behavior but rather a negative superficial civility that is highly detrimental to organizations. This paper temporarily sets aside this controversial scenario in subsequent discussions.

3.2.1 Internal Enhancement

Compared with other positive behaviors in organizations, workplace civility occurs more frequently, covers a broader range, and manifests in all aspects of employees’ work lives. Therefore, individuals have ample opportunities to enact workplace civility, gradually accumulating to form a habitual behavioral tendency. Edyvane (2017) argues that civility is a special “habit” that conveys “how citizens position themselves.” Civility is a “benevolent attitude” where civil behavior involves self-management according to customary norms and treating others with humility, moderation, restraint, and respect.

Civil behavior can improve individuals’ attitudes toward work and enhance their positive experiences in the workplace. Research has found that workplace civility can improve individuals’ work attitudes, self-esteem, job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and prosocial behavior (Spence Laschinger, Finegan, & Wilk, 2009; Montalvo, 2013), while reducing absenteeism and burnout (Leiter et al., 2011). For example, Kang, Twigg, and Hertzman’ s (2010) study found that civil behavior can enhance individuals’ self-evaluation and strengthen perceptions of goodwill, which helps reduce burnout and turnover intentions.

Meanwhile, workplace civility also serves to enhance the self. Previous researchers have always associated positive behaviors with a strong inner self, believing that individuals who enact positive behaviors are often confident, enthusiastic, and full of power. Workplace civility does not demand high individual resources. For those lacking confidence or with lower power and status in organizations, becoming a better person may be the internal motivation for engaging in civil behavior. In organizations, they may not perform outstandingly but still consider themselves valuable. According to self-verification theory (Boyle, 2017), to gain a sense of control and predictability over the external environment, people continuously obtain or elicit feedback consistent with their self-concept,

thereby maintaining consistency between actions and self-concept. Individuals gain a sense of competence and efficiency through engaging in workplace civility, thus feeling capable, meaningful, and valuable in the organization. These feelings prompt individuals to form positive self-concepts, enhance organization-based self-esteem, thereby stimulating internal motivation and giving rise to work-related positive outcomes such as work engagement and organizational citizenship behavior (Zhu, 2016).

3.2.2 External Enhancement

Workplace civility requires employees to expend certain resources but does not necessarily give them corresponding returns. Some employees even worry that performing well at work may lead to exploitation (Porath & Gerbasi, 2015). In fact, workplace civility not only does not cause individual loss but also generates some unexpected benefits; these benefits are simply hidden or delayed.

First, workplace civility shapes individual image. Workplace civility is associated with warm and friendly attitudes, giving behavior recipients an impression that the actor is competent, professionally competent, good-tempered, kind to others, and upright in character (Edyvane, 2017; Porath & Gerbasi, 2015). Although workplace civility is relatively minor and often expressed in non-verbal forms, it affects behavior recipients' feelings. For example, a smile or a nod conveys positive signals to the other party—“you are happy to work with team members” and “you care about others' concerns” (Cuddy, Kohut, & Neffinger, 2013). People in your surroundings gradually develop positive evaluations and a sense of identification with you through comfortable experiences of interacting with you.

Second, workplace civility can expand social networks, bringing individuals substantial effective information, advice, career opportunities, and greater trust in interpersonal interactions. People tend to believe that civil individuals complete work better and are willing to share information, resources, projects, or support with them (Porath & Gerbasi, 2015). Meanwhile, workplace civility makes individuals' opinions more valued and garners more support from leaders and colleagues (Porath et al., 2015).

Finally, civil individuals gain more career development opportunities and promotion prospects. Research shows that 72% of human resources executives consider rudeness a disadvantageous factor affecting career prospects. Conversely, conveying more words of cooperation, trust, and respect in interpersonal interactions can win individuals higher support rates (Porath & Gerbasi, 2015). Thus, workplace civility can prevent personal career losses caused by negligent or inappropriate behavior. Meanwhile, workplace civility largely reflects individuals' attitudes toward work—“how serious you are” and “how determined you are to meet challenges” (Cuddy et al., 2013)—which wins them trust and support, enhances their leadership in colleagues' eyes, and lays the foundation for them to assume leadership positions.

3.3 Workplace Civility Optimizes Organizational Development

Workplace civility is crucial for a healthy work environment. Civil behavior can improve safety climate and reduce workplace injuries (McGonagle, Walsh, Kath, & Morrow, 2014). People work better and achieve more when they share basic work norms and respect each other (McDonald, Stockton, & Landrum, 2018). Numerous researchers have demonstrated that civil behavior can reduce turnover intentions, strengthen individuals' connection to work, enhance work engagement and performance (Maslach & Leiter, 2017), thereby increasing productivity and organizational gains (Montalvo, 2013) and promoting the overall positive functioning of the organization.

Meanwhile, civil behavior is a lubricant for organizational relationships, capable of optimizing a supportive work environment (Kang et al., 2010) and reducing interpersonal deviance when facing organizational constraints (Clark & Walsh, 2016), preventing some opinion conflicts from escalating into violence or behavioral conflicts (Edyvane, 2017). Social exchange theory and the norm of reciprocity demonstrate that when treated with respect, people feel better about themselves and are more likely to return kindness, potentially triggering a positive interaction cycle (Yan Yu & Li Jiali, 2017). This positive spiral effect has not yet been empirically confirmed, but the positive effects of workplace civility in interpersonal relationships have been widely validated, showing different modes of operation across various interaction relationships. This paper will analyze the specific mechanisms of workplace civility from different relational perspectives, propose some research paradigms, and outline a basic research framework (see Figure 2 [Figure 2: see original paper]).

3.3.1 Employee-Employee Workplace Civility Civil behavior demonstrates warmth, friendliness, and other-oriented traits, signaling motivation to establish and maintain positive relationships with others (Porath, 2011), releasing a warm, affiliative force that makes behavior recipients feel pleasant and comfortable. Thus, civil behavior reduces distance among colleagues, promotes willingness to communicate, and helps decrease disagreements. Simultaneously, civil behavior is also a manifestation of work competence; employees pay attention to other colleagues, are willing to comply with norms, and regulate their own behavior (Porath, 2011). Compared with incivility that excludes and drives others away (Schilpzand & Huang, 2018), workplace civility can attract others. When employees feel respected by colleagues, they feel safe, tend to like the other party (Jensen-Campbell, Knack, & Gomez, 2010), and want to join their ranks (Cuddy et al., 2013). Employees who engage in more civil behavior make colleagues feel safe and trustworthy, thus willing to share viewpoints and information with them, promoting information exchange and sharing among colleagues. The personal competence and ability demonstrated through civil behavior further strengthen communication effectiveness, optimizing colleague exchange and cooperation, thereby improving performance (Porath & Gerbasi, 2015) and cultivating a harmonious and friendly organizational culture.

3.3.2 Leader-Subordinate Workplace Civility Cuddy et al. (2013) argue that warmth and competence encompass 90% of individuals' positive/negative impressions of others. Traditional thinking always highlights leaders' abilities and strengths—relatively hard factors—when emphasizing leadership. What they fail to realize is that before establishing trust with subordinates, leaders' display of competence can easily trigger subordinates' negative emotions, weakening their cognitive potential, creativity, and problem-solving abilities, and triggering deviant behaviors. In fact, when subordinates evaluate leaders, they first look not at how capable the leader is but at whether the leader is likable, which involves factors such as warmth, communication, and trustworthiness. The special characteristic of workplace civility is that it leads people to be evaluated as both warm and competent (Porath & Gerbasi, 2015), making it an effective leadership strategy.

Candidate and Leiter' s (2014) research found that civil behavior can optimize relationships among colleagues but has limited effect on supervisor-employee relationships, possibly because employee-supervisor interactions are often limited to instruction and command, leaving no room for friendly and cordial relationships. Their study precisely reflects the scarcity of civil leadership behavior in today's workplaces. Workplace civility is an important means of optimizing leadership approaches, transforming the path from intimidation-then-leadership to influence-then-leadership (Cuddy et al., 2013), demonstrating warmth and affinity to employees, reducing status differences, decreasing disagreements between leaders and subordinates (Andersson & Pearson, 1999), making them feel pleasant, comfortable, safe, and trusting, and greatly enhancing their health and well-being (Porath & Gerbasi, 2015).

Meanwhile, the special characteristic of leaders is that they are also spokespersons for the organization; thus, leaders' civil behavior makes employees feel they receive attention, are accepted by the organization, and are important and meaningful to the organization. Employees use leaders' expressions and behaviors to define themselves. Workplace interactions characterized by dignity, respect, and communication make employees feel appreciated and valued, thereby enhancing their sense of belonging (Jawahar & Schreurs, 2018). According to self-enhancement theory, individuals who invest more self-awareness in their work enhance themselves through better performance. Therefore, civil behavior from leaders makes employees feel their own value and strength, strengthens employees' organizational commitment and work engagement, and increases the likelihood of future positive interactions with others (Porath & Gerbasi, 2015).

3.3.3 Employee-Customer Workplace Civility Whether civil behavior between employees or between leaders and employees, both are established within the same organizational context, possessing a sense of group belonging to the same organization. Workplace civility functions similarly to a lubricant in these relationships. However, for interactions between employees and customers, establishing trust is crucial yet more difficult. Workplace civility in this

relationship functions more like a stepping stone.

Workplace civility is the key to initiating positive employee-customer interactions. Employees' civil behavior toward customers includes sensitivity to customer reactions and the ability to adjust their own performance (Panagopoulos & Ogilvie, 2015), conveying a sincere and friendly attitude that considers customers' interests—such as asking humbly, expressing sincere gratitude, showing understanding to customers, and pointing out the benefits of a matter for both parties (Porath & Gerbasi, 2015). These make customers feel their interests are considered, generating positive evaluations of employees: articulate, hard-working, professional, etc., while also increasing customers' comfort and sense of security. These positive feelings directly enhance customers' trust in employees and facilitate subsequent cooperation, bringing potential resources to employees. For example, customers who have better service experiences may promote through communication within their social circles, increasing employee performance and enhancing organizational reputation; customers who highly evaluate employees' professionalism may also provide employees with some resources or job opportunities.

In real-world situations, the number of times the same employee serves the same customer is limited (Walker, Jaarsveld, & Skarlicki, 2017), making the benefits of civility difficult to manifest while the costs of incivility are low. To address this issue, many companies incorporate customer satisfaction as an important component of employee work outcomes, with customer satisfaction scores directly affecting employee performance, rewards, and punishments.

4. Future Directions

This paper defines the connotation of workplace civility and elucidates its relationship with incivility, but some ambiguities remain in the relationship between these two concepts. Many scholars believe civil and uncivil behaviors are opposites, but this does not mean that a behavior is civil as long as it is not uncivil. Workplace civility and incivility do not appear to have an either-or relationship. For example, not writing greetings in emails to colleagues or not smiling when serving customers does not constitute uncivil behavior. Similarly, not interrupting colleagues, fidgeting, or doing one's own thing during meetings does not seem to qualify as civil behavior either. Does a transitional behavior exist between workplace civility and incivility? This requires more researchers to investigate and clarify. We believe there exists a neutral behavior between civil and uncivil behaviors. Both neutral and civil behaviors conform to mutual respect norms and lack harmful intent. Civil behavior has certain positive intentions and is other-oriented. Neutral behavior is based on fulfilling role obligations, having neither positive intentions nor negative tendencies, and is conflict-avoidance oriented. Uncivil behavior, however, violates organizational mutual respect norms and is a deviant behavior with certain harmful intentions.

Meanwhile, current research finds that workplace civility and incivility do not

have a direct canceling effect; more civil behaviors are often needed to overcome the negativity of incivility (Cortina et al., 2017). Additionally, civility intervention studies in organizations typically last for extended periods (e.g., one year) (Leiter, Day, Oore, & Spence Laschinger, 2012), with short-term civility interventions showing no significant impact on employee incivility. These studies suggest that the positive degree of workplace civility may be lower than the negative degree of incivility, or that civility's effects are not immediate and involve certain delayed effects requiring long-term observational research. The specific mechanisms need more research validation.

Furthermore, research on workplace (in)civility should adopt a dynamic perspective. Current research indicates that individuals' judgments of workplace (in)civility may not be based on comprehensive consideration of behaviors but on "thin slices" of behavioral information to quickly make judgments about respect (Porath et al., 2015). Which "thin slices" make people feel civility? Can "thin slices" perceived as "civil" be perceived as "uncivil" in certain situations? Is an individual labeled as civil more likely to be seen as civil in the future? Can an individual labeled as uncivil be seen as civil in the future? For example, Scott (2015) argues that civility limits acceptable speech; once perceived as uncivil, individuals lose credibility and rationality in others' eyes, and their critical ideas will not be accepted. Therefore, the research focus on workplace (in)civility should not be limited to external manifestations but should concentrate on the dynamic processes of its occurrence, development, and how it is perceived by individuals. Meanwhile, the effects of (in)civility are profound; what are the long-term effects on the instigator themselves? Current workplace (in)civility research mostly remains at the level of why instigators enact behaviors and the effects on recipients, without concerning itself with why recipients consider a behavior civil or uncivil. What are the key triggers of civil/uncivil perception, and can civility and incivility transform into each other? These dynamic issues urgently require in-depth exploration by researchers.

Finally, promoting organizational civility is an important practical issue. Current organizational behavior researchers emphasize that civil behavior has a good inhibitory effect on workplace incivility, advocating blocking the spread of incivility in organizations by increasing the overall incidence of civil behavior. This is a good research approach. Meanwhile, Potterton (2018) proposes a top-down influence approach, arguing that enhancing organizational civility should start with leaders and gradually influence employees. Additionally, research shows that individuals' perceptions of organizational civility climate directly affect their willingness to accept civility training and their learning motivation (Walsh & Magley, 2018); thus, cultivating a civil organizational climate is crucial. Existing civility cultivation models mainly target the entire organization, lacking individualized training and development models. To promote employees' civil development, organizations need to develop effective training and incentive strategies.

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