

WORKPLACE INCIVILITY AND ITS EFFECTS ON  
ORGANIZATIONAL CITIZENSHIP BEHAVIOR:  
THE ROLE OF EMOTIONS AS MEDIATORS AND  
HOSTILE ATTRIBUTION BIAS AS A MODERATOR

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UNIVERSITI KEBANGSAAN MALAYSIA

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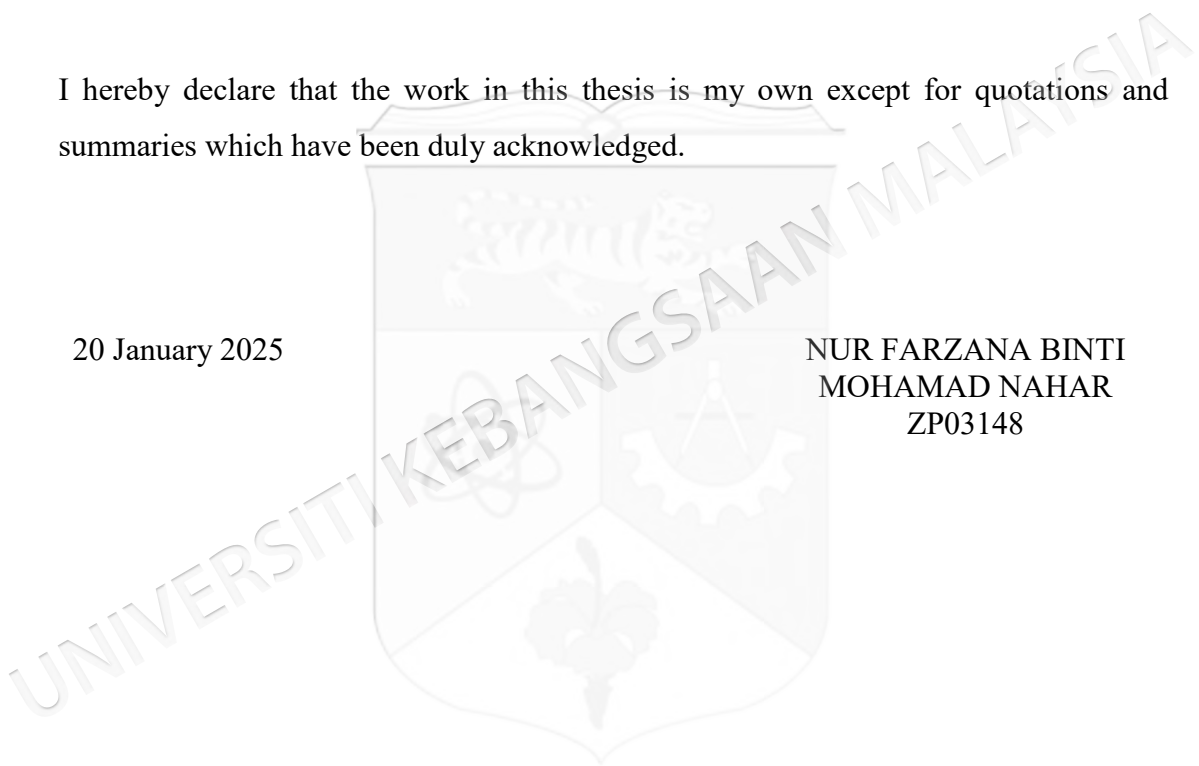
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## DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the work in this thesis is my own except for quotations and summaries which have been duly acknowledged.

20 January 2025

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## ABSTRAK

Ketidaksopanan di tempat kerja semakin meningkat dan semakin berleluasa dalam organisasi pada hari ini. Walaupun ketidaksopanan di tempat kerja tidak begitu ketara, kesan-kesan dari tingkah laku tersebut terlalu penting untuk diketepikan begitu sahaja. Didasari oleh Teori Pertukaran Sosial, Teori Peristiwa Afektif dan Teori Pemuliharaan Sumber, kajian ini bertujuan mengkaji akibat ketidaksopanan di tempat kerja. Khususnya, kajian ini mengkaji perhubungan antara ketidaksopanan di tempat kerja dan tingkah laku kewarganegaraan organisasi menggunakan kerangka kerja perantaraan-penyederhanaan dengan perasaan-perasaan marah, malu, tersinggung dan terhina sebagai perantara dan bias atribusi bermusuhan sebagai penyederhana. Data diperolehi daripada 359 orang pekerja yang bekerja di dalam sektor awam di Malaysia. Hipotesis kajian diuji menggunakan *partial least squares structural equation modelling*. Keputusan kajian menunjukkan bahawa perhubungan langsung antara ketidaksopanan di tempat kerja dan tingkah laku kewarganegaraan organisasi tidak signifikan. Berkait dengan perhubungan tidak langsung, keputusan kajian menunjukkan bahawa hanya perasaan tersinggung dan bukan rasa marah, malu, dan terhina menjadi perantara kepada perhubungan ketidaksopanan di tempat kerja-tingkah laku kewarganegaraan organisasi. Keputusan perhubungan tidak langsung juga menunjukkan bahawa perasaan tersinggung menjadi perantara penuh perhubungan antara ketidaksopanan di tempat kerja dan tingkah laku kewarganegaraan organisasi. Akhir sekali, kajian semasa mendapati adanya kesan tidak signifikan bias atribusi bermusuhan dalam menyederhana perhubungan di antara ketidaksopanan di tempat kerja dan tingkah laku kewarganegaraan organisasi. Mengikut teorinya, kajian semasa memberi nilai tambah kepada ilmu sedia ada dengan menyokong; (a) kepentingan mengkaji emosi berasingan dalam mengkaji ketidaksopanan di tempat kerja, dan (b) kepentingan teori peristiwa afektif dalam memperjelaskan hubungan di antara peristiwa kerja dan tingkah laku berpandukan elemen afektif. Secara praktikalnya, kajian semasa memaklumkan kepada pengurusan bahawa ketidaksopanan di tempat kerja adalah satu masalah yang benar dan nyata. Mempunyai pengalaman menghadapi tingkah laku sedemikian boleh mengganggu emosi di tempat kerja, yang mana ia juga memberi kesan kepada tingkah laku berasaskan budi bicara. Oleh itu, adalah penting kepada organisasi untuk melaksanakan strategi-strategi efektif dalam mengelakkan berleluasanya tingkah laku tidak sopan di tempat kerja, dan untuk mengurus emosi para pekerja di tempat kerja. Kajian masa depan boleh memperluaskan skop kajian bagi membolehkan hasil kajian digeneralisasikan bagi keseluruhan sector perkhidmatan awam di Malaysia.

## ABSTRACT

Workplace incivility is on the rise and becoming more common in today's organization. Although workplace incivility is subtle, the consequences of the behavior are too overwhelming to be ignored. Underpinned by Social Exchange Theory, Affective Events Theory and Conservation of Resources Theory, this study aims to investigate the consequences of workplace incivility. Specifically, this study examined the relationship between workplace incivility and organizational citizenship behavior using a mediation-moderation framework with anger, embarrassment, hurt feelings and contempt as mediators and hostile attribution bias as a moderator. Data were obtained from 359 employees working in Malaysia public sector. The study hypotheses were tested using partial least squares structural equation modelling. The study's findings revealed that the direct relationship between workplace incivility and organizational citizenship behavior was not significant. In relation to the indirect relationship, the results showed that only hurt feelings and not anger, embarrassment and contempt, mediated the workplace incivility-organizational citizenship behavior relationship. The result of the indirect relationship also revealed that hurt feelings fully mediated the relationship between workplace incivility and organizational citizenship behavior. Finally, the present study found a non-significant effect of hostile attribution bias in moderating the relationship between workplace incivility and organizational citizenship behavior. Theoretically, the present study adds to the body of knowledge by providing some support for; (a) the importance of examining discrete emotions in workplace incivility research, and (b) the importance of Affective Events Theory in explaining the link between a work event and an affective-driven behavior. Practically, the present study informs managements that workplace incivility is a real problem. Experiencing such behavior can disrupt emotions at work, consequently impacting voluntary actions. Hence, it becomes imperative for organizations to deploy effective strategies for curbing uncivil conduct and managing employees' emotions at work. Future research could expand its scope to ensure the generalization of the results for the overall public sector organization in Malaysia.

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### LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AET	Affective Events Theory
AVE	Average Variance Extracted
CB-SEM	Covariance-Based Structural Modeling
COR	Conservation of Resources Theory
CMB	Common Method Bias
HAB	Hostile Attribution Bias
HTMT	Heterotrait-Monotrait Correlation
ICAWS	Interpersonal Conflict at Work Scale
MAE	Mean Absolute Error
NIS	Nursing Incivility Scale
OCB	Organizational Citizenship Behavior
OCBI	Organizational Citizenship Behavior Directed at Individual
PLS	Partial Least Squares
PLS-SEM	Variance-Based Partial Least Squares
RMSE	Root Mean Square Error
SDB	Social Desirability Bias
SEM	Structural Equation Modeling
SET	Social Exchange Theory
SPSS v21	Statistical Package for Social Sciences version 21
TICS	Team Incivility Climate Scale
UBCNE	Uncivil Behavior in Clinical Nursing Education
UWBQ	Uncivil Workplace Behavior Questionnaire
UWBQ-I	Uncivil Workplace Behavior Questionnaire-Instigator
VIF	Variance Inflation Factor
WICS	Workplace Interpersonal Conflict Scale
WIS	Workplace Incivility Scale

## **CHAPTER I**

### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **1.1 CHAPTER OVERVIEW**

This chapter introduces the research agenda of the study. It includes research background, research problem, research objectives, contributions of the study, definition of key terms, and organization of the study.

#### **1.2 RESEARCH BACKGROUND**

Over the past two decades, workplace mistreatment has drawn attention in organizational behavior research. Initially, the research mainly focused on examining severe forms of mistreatment in the workplace, such as deviant behaviour, abusive supervision, aggression, and bullying. However, later research has shifted the focus towards examining the subtle forms of workplace mistreatment, which is workplace incivility. Unlike the other forms of workplace mistreatment, the prevalence of workplace incivility is on the rise within organizations (Cortina et al. 2017; Cortina et al. 2022; He et al. 2021; Guo et al. 2022; Kuriakose et al. 2023; Mackey et al. 2019; Schilpzand et al. 2016; Taylor et al. 2022; Zahid & Nauman 2024). Workplace incivility, which refers to low-intensity deviant behaviour with ambiguous intent to harm that violates workplace norms for mutual respect has made the workplace a less friendly place (Andersson & Pearson 1999; Cortina et al. 2017). Examples of workplace incivility include disturbing colleagues, undermining another person's work, making nasty comments, addressing others in an inappropriate way, making an improper joke, neglecting to say thank you or please, and interrupting people's conversations (Andersson & Pearson 1999; Pearson et al. 2000). These examples demonstrate that workplace incivility comprises employees' behaviors that imply rudeness,

disrespectful, and lack of courtesy for others that violate basic organizational standards of respect (Cortina et al. 2022; Pearson et al. 2000).

Workplace incivility that is characteristically ambiguous, low-intensity, and violates the norm for mutual respect can have negative effects on both individual and organizations. In 2013, Porath and Pearson reported that over the past 14 years, 98 percent of workers in the United States of America and Canada experienced incivility. Their survey statistics showed that 48 percent of employees intentionally decreased their work effort, 47 percent of employees intentionally decreased the time spent at work, 38 percent of employees decreased the quality of their work, 63 percent of employees lost work time avoiding the offenders, 66 percent of employees declined in performance, 78 percent of employees decreased organizational commitment, 12 percent of employees left their job due to uncivil treatment, and 25 percent of employees admitted taking their frustration out on customers. The data suggest that incivility is a critical issue for organizations to address.

Workplace incivility is not only uncivil but it also results in tangible and intangible costs. Due to this rude behavior, the targets experienced various negative affective, psychological, attitudinal, and behavioral outcomes. Affectively, research has found that workplace incivility elicits negative emotions such as fear (e.g., Bunk & Magley 2013), anxiety (e.g., Miner & Eischeid 2012) and guilt (e.g., Hulsheger et al. 2021) among employees. Psychologically, workplace incivility has been reported to increase the level of employee stress (e.g., Schilpzand et al. 2016), increase employee burnout (e.g., Han et al. 2016), and trigger employee depression (e.g., Geldart et al. 2018). Attitudinally, workplace incivility reduces employee work engagement (e.g., Chen et al. 2013; Guo et al. 2021), reduces employee job satisfaction (e.g., Mackey et al. 2019), and reduces employee organizational commitment (e.g., Kabat-Farr et al. 2018). Behaviorally, workplace incivility is negatively associated with increases employee withdrawal behavior (e.g., Schilpzand et al. 2016), encourages employee deviance behavior (e.g., Itzkovich 2016; Itzkovich & Heilbrunn 2016), and lowers organizational citizenship behavior (e.g., Liu et al. 2019). These outcomes emphasize that even though workplace incivility is discounted as a small negative event, its consequences are too overwhelming to be ignored. More than that, these consequences

can tarnish organizational reputations that can influence its success and sustainability (Pearson et al. 2000). Therefore, the presence of workplace incivility, which negatively impacts both employees and organizations poses challenges for fostering a positive and healthy work environment as it contributes to a toxic work atmosphere.

Additionally, the published work on workplace incivility also shows that workplace incivility affects employees beyond their professions such as educators (e.g., Torkelson et al. 2016), and nurses (e.g., Wing et al. 2015); industries including financial (e.g., Lim & Teo 2009), hospitality (e.g., Cho et al. 2016), and public sectors (e.g., Young et al. 2019); as well as geographical areas such as US (e.g., He et al. 2021; Kabat-Farr et al. 2018), Australia (e.g., NicholSEN & Griffin 2016; Paulin & Griffin 2016), China (e.g., Guo et al. 2022; Zhou et al. 2015), India (e.g., Kuriakose et al. 2023), Singapore (e.g., Lim & Lee 2011; Loh et al. 2021), and South Korea (e.g., Cho et al. 2016; Han, et al. Cho 2016). The presence of workplace incivility across various professions, industries, and geographical areas suggests that workplace incivility is a pervasive issue and thus requires more investigation by researchers.

To date, several scholars have also reported the occurrence of workplace incivility incidents in Malaysia (e.g., Alias et al. 2022; Arshad & Ismail 2018; Azizan & Razlina 2015; Ismail et al. 2018; Wafa et al. 2016). These studies have consistently reported that incivility in Malaysian workplaces can lead to significant negative outcomes for both individuals and organizations. This is further illustrated by court cases such as *Awang Abdullah v. Sime Darby Plantation Berhad* [2021] (Award No. 1236 of 2021), where an employee alleged that unjust treatment by the employer created an uncivil work environment, ultimately resulting in his constructive dismissal. Another case is *Sebastian Matthias Boehme v. Siemens Malaysia Sdn Bhd* [2017] (Award No. 667 of 2017), where an employee's service was terminated following reports of rude behaviour toward hotel guests and staff. Additionally, in *Loo Choon Siong v. King Koil (M) Sdn Bhd* [2011] 11(1) JPP 12/2011, the employee claimed that he was subjected to rude and disrespectful behaviour by his employer, which resulted in his unfair dismissal. These cases suggest that workplace incivility is a problem in Malaysian workplaces too.

In sum, previous research has demonstrated that workplace incivility is a threat to both individuals and organizations. It is experienced by employees who work in all types of occupations and industries across regions. Given the prevalence rate of workplace incivility, which is believed to be much more common than other forms of mistreatment, understanding workplace incivility implications could provide a balanced perspective why workplace incivility deserves more attention from researchers. Specifically, through investigating its outcomes, it gives better understanding of the potential implications of incivility impact.

### **1.3 RESEARCH PROBLEM**

Since the seminal work of Andersson and Pearson (1999), the number of research on workplace incivility has increased in the scholarly database. The emerging numbers of research in this area suggest that managers and organizational scholars have become increasingly concerned with the profoundly negative impacts of workplace incivility. Considering the impact of workplace incivility, many efforts have been made by previous research in attempt to investigate the consequences such as reduced employee job satisfaction and organizational commitment (e.g., Mackey et al. 2019; Kabat-Farr et al. 2018), as well as including mediating variables such as self-blame and burnout (e.g., Schilpzand et al. 2016; Liu et al. 2019) and moderating variables such as organizational support and affective commitment (e.g., He et al. 2021; Liu et al. 2019) in workplace incivility research. Although these previous studies have increased the understanding on the impact of workplace incivility, there are still gaps in the knowledge. Therefore, this study will address the research gap that require further research.

In understanding the workplace incivility phenomenon, researchers have investigated workplace incivility from three perspectives: experienced, witnessed, and instigated. Experienced incivility focuses on the targets or victims of uncivil incidents in the workplace (e.g., Guo et al. 2022; He et al. 2021; Young et al. 2019). Meanwhile, witnessed incivility focuses on individuals who witness uncivil behavior in the workplace (e.g., Miner & Cortina 2016; Totterdell et al. 2012; Woolum et al. 2017). On the other hand, instigated incivility focuses on individuals who act uncivilly towards

others in the workplace (e.g., Harold & Holtz 2015; Torkelson et al. 2016). Of the three streams of incivility perspectives, many studies have examined incivility from the target perspective as compared to the studies from witness and instigator perspectives. This is not surprising given that most scholars conceptualized workplace incivility following Andersson and Pearson's (1999) definition, which is primarily concerned with how experiencing workplace incivility affects target's attitude and behavior. This emphasis has led researchers to suggest examining workplace incivility from the witness's and instigator's perspectives (e.g., Gallus et al. 2014; Mackey et al. 2019). Nevertheless, realising that individuals who become the target of incivility suffer the highest level of physical and psychological damage when incivility occurs, understanding the target's perspective is as important as examining workplace incivility phenomenon from witness's and instigator's perspective. In this study, workplace incivility is defined based on Andersson and Pearson's (1999) conception of it. Therefore, following Andersson and Pearson's (1999) conceptualization of workplace incivility that is primarily concerned with the target's perspective and reactions, and based on the review from previous research on workplace incivility, this study will focus on understanding uncivil experiences from the target perspective.

In workplace incivility research, previous studies have investigated various behavioral outcomes of workplace incivility experiences. Among them are counterproductive work behavior (e.g., Sakurai & Jex 2012; Spexor & Fox 2002), withdrawal behavior such as absenteeism (e.g., Abubakar et al. 2017; Schilpzand et al. 2016), turnover intention (e.g., Han et al. 2016; Mackey et al. 2019; Miner & Cortina 2016; Rahim & Cosby 2016; Squera et al. 2016) and job performance (e.g., Chen et al. 2013; Rahin & Cosby 2016; Rhee et al. 2017; Porath & Erez 2009). While these studies have expanded the understanding of behavioral consequences of workplace incivility, there remains limited insight about the extent to which workplace incivility affects voluntary work behaviors, such as organizational citizenship behavior (OCB). OCB, which encompasses employees' voluntary behaviors, plays a crucial role in supporting effective organizational functioning. Research shows that OCB is associated with reduced employee turnover and enhanced organizational productivity and profitability (Becton et al. 2017; Podsakoff et al. 2009), even in the presence of negative behaviors like workplace bullying (e.g., Devonish 2013), coworker antagonism (e.g., Chiaburu &

Harrison 2008), and abusive supervision (e.g., Ahmad et al. 2019). Only a few studies (e.g., Jawahar & Schreurs 2018; Liu et al. 2019; Mackey et al. 2019) demonstrated that workplace incivility has negative impact on employees OCB. However, these studies did not specifically address whether employees respond to incivility by targeting organization or specific individuals. Therefore, investigating the impact of workplace incivility on OCB can provide more understanding into how incivility shapes employee behavior and whom employees direct their responses toward when reacting to uncivil incidents.

In tit-for-tat exchanges of workplace incivility, although Andersson and Pearson (1999) proposed that workplace incivility can escalate into more intense reciprocal behavior (e.g., aggression) following uncivil incidents, there is also a possibility that employees may reciprocate the perceived incivility in subtle ways, which is not punishable by the management (Ismail et al. 2018). That is, targets of incivility may choose to withdraw OCB mainly towards a specific individual, which is the instigator (OCBI) in order to reciprocate the uncivil treatment given to them (e.g., target refuses to help the instigator with his or her work). Such a possibility can be explained using Blau's (1964) Social Exchange Theory, which suggests that individuals may reciprocate positive treatment for positive treatment and return negative treatment for negative treatment to maintain the balance of exchange relationship. In this study, the exchange process may be interpreted based on the target's perspective and the instigator who has acted uncivilly towards the target. Hence, when an employee treats another poorly, the employee on the receiving end will respond with unfavourable behavior in order to maintain the balance of the exchange relationship. Besides, a meta-analysis study also showed that when an individual perceives that he or she has been negatively treated, he or she may make more personal attributions, directing his or her response to retaliate that is more narrowly targeted at a specific individual (Chiaburu & Harrison 2008). Therefore, in this study, targets of workplace incivility are expected to engage less in OCBI.

In addition to the direct relationship, the effect of workplace incivility on OCBI can also be understood through mediating mechanisms such as emotions. In life, work events (i.e., workplace incivility) can trigger emotions in people and these emotions

have the potential to influence people's behavior (i.e., OCBI) in the workplace (Ashforth & Humphrey 1995; Ashkanasy et al. 2017). Nevertheless, the role of emotions as underlying mechanism for understanding employee experiences and behavior has received less attention, leading scholars (e.g., Ashkanasy & Dorris 2017; Kabat-Farr et al. 2018) to emphasize the need for further investigation of emotions in organizational research, highlighting it as a potential area for valuable insight. Focusing on a specific cause, emotions have come to be regarded as discrete and are linked to specific tendencies to act (Barsade & Gibson 2007). Based on review of workplace incivility literature, four discrete emotions, which are anger, embarrassment, hurt feelings, and contempt are chosen as mediators in the relationship between workplace incivility and OCBI.

In this study, the assertion that anger may act as a mediating mechanism in the relationship between workplace incivility and OCBI is theoretically supported by the Affective Events Theory (AET) (Weiss & Cropanzano 1996). AET posits that individuals react emotionally to work events, which then affect their work behavior. In the workplace, experiencing workplace incivility (e.g., perceived insulting remarks from a coworker) can cause an employee to experience a loss of face and prevent his or her desire to maintain a positive view of the self (Andersson & Pearson 1999; Chen et al. 2013). As a result, workplace incivility perceived by the target as harmful criticism, an insult or a threat, as well as attacks on one's desired identity may trigger anger (Porath & Pearson 2012). Anger such as getting annoyed at the instigator for his or her rude behavior in return, can motivate the target to seek retaliation against the instigator such as by withdrawing voluntary behavior. This situation, thus, may explain why targets reduce their OCBI. Anger, in particular, is a discrete emotion that is often discussed in workplace incivility literature (e.g., Kabat-Farr et al. 2018; Miner & Eischeid 2012; Porath & Pearson 2012). Nevertheless, the workplace incivility literature still lacks an empirical examination of the role of anger as a mediating mechanism. It remains unclear whether workplace incivility triggers anger among targets, which then reduces their OCBI. Identifying anger as a mediator in the relationship between workplace incivility and OCBI can offer deeper insight into why, how, and for whom this relationship exists (Baron & Kenny 1986; MacKinnon 2007).

Therefore, anger deserves attention in understanding how workplace incivility reduces target's OCBI.

Similarly, using AET, embarrassment may act as a mediating mechanism in the relationship between workplace incivility and OCBI. Theoretically, AET posits that individuals react emotionally to work events, which then affect their work behaviour (Weiss & Cropanzano 1996). Work events such as workplace incivility can threaten one's presented self and trigger negative sentiments about oneself especially when targets evaluate the uncivil treatment through the lens of others at work (Hershcovis et al. 2017). As a result, experiencing uncivil behavior may trigger embarrassment among targets caused by a loss of face (Andersson & Pearson 1999). Embarrassment such as getting uncomfortable when instigator makes disrespectful remarks about target may cause target to distance themselves from instigator (Hershcovis et al. 2017). As a consequence, the target's OCBI may be jeopardized. Thus far, no empirical investigation has been carried out to validate whether workplace incivility triggers embarrassment in targets, which in turn reduces their OCBI, suggesting a potential area for exploration. Therefore, exploring the role of embarrassment as a mediator in the relationship between workplace incivility and OCBI can provide deeper insight into the underlying mechanisms within this relationship.

Additionally, hurt feelings is also proposed as another mediating mechanism underlying the relationship between workplace incivility and OCBI. Theoretically, AET posits that individuals react emotionally to work events, which then affect their work behaviour (Weiss & Cropanzano 1996). According to Vangelisti et al. (2005), hurt feelings is an emotion evoked by social interaction. Thus, a work event such as workplace incivility that arises from social interaction is likely to trigger hurt feelings in responding to the event. Hurt feelings such as getting hurt from being ignored or excluded from professional camaraderie tend to influence target to distance himself or herself from the person who hurt his or her feelings (Vangelisti et al. 2005). As a result, the target's may be less inclined to engage in OCBI. Nevertheless, less attention has been given in examining the relationship between workplace incivility and OCBI with hurt feelings as a mediating mechanism, indicating the need for further research. In a related study, Ismail et al. (2018) found that hurt feelings are related to coworker

helping among a sample of Malaysian employees. Nevertheless, their study only examined a specific element (i.e., coworker helping) that is part of OCBI's larger conceptualization. Therefore, hurt feelings deserves attention in understanding how workplace incivility reduces target's OCBI.

Finally, another possible mediating mechanism that may explain workplace incivility and OCBI relationship is contempt. The proposed mediation is supported with AET positing that individuals react emotionally to work events, which then affect their work behaviour (Weiss & Cropanzano 1996). Contempt, which refer to disliking or hatred against someone's behavior is one of the emotions commonly occurs in negative social interaction (Fisher 2011; Fisher & Roseman 2007). Hence, workplace incivility, which encompasses rude and disrespectful interaction, is likely to trigger contempt in responding to the event. Contempt such as disdain or hatred towards the instigator due to their rude and disrespectful behavior might prompt the target to distance themselves by avoiding or excluding the instigator from their social network (Fisher & Roseman 2007). As a result, contempt can reduce the likelihood of the target's engaging in OCBI. In a qualitative study by Pearson et al. (2001), participants who encountered workplace incivility highlighted contempt as one of the emotions they experienced, indicating the need for empirical examination. Besides, it remains unclear whether workplace incivility triggers contempt among targets, which in turn reduces their OCBI, pointing to a gap in research. Therefore, exploring the role of contempt as a mediator in workplace incivility and OCBI relationship can provide valuable insight into how workplace incivility influences the target's OCBI.

Adding moderating variables such as individual differences will contribute to explain targets' reactions to experienced incivility (Andersson & Pearson 1999; Pearson et al. 2001; Schilpzand et al. 2016). Based on the Conservation of Resources Theory (Hobfoll & Lerman 1989) that suggests individuals with different traits appraise resource loss differently, hostile attribution bias may moderate the relationship between negative work events and behavioral responses. Because workplace incivility depletes or threatens employees' resources (e.g., negative reputation and lower self-worth), employees tend to engage less in OCBI as a way to conserve their remaining resources in response to experienced negative events. However, this situation may differ based on

individual's hostile attribution bias (Hobfoll 2001). Those with high hostile attribution bias are more likely to interpret other people's actions as intentionally hostile when experiencing uncivil treatment (Zhou et al. 2015; Zhu et al. 2019). Thus, when experiencing uncivil treatment in which resources are at risk of being lost, individuals with high hostile attribution bias may withhold OCBI as a way to conserve the resources. In contrast, individuals with low hostile attribution bias tend to excuse other people's behavior (Lyu et al. 2016). When experiencing uncivil treatment, individuals with low hostile attribution bias tend to interpret it as unintentional treatment. Despite experiencing uncivil treatment in which resources are at risk of being lost, individuals with low hostile attribution bias are less likely to withhold OCBI because they do not regard workplace incivility as a threat and can cope with the situation. Nevertheless, the moderating effect of hostile attribution bias on the relationship between workplace incivility and OCBI remain unclear, suggesting a potential area for further research. Therefore, the present study addresses this gap in workplace incivility research by examining the moderating effect of hostile attribution bias on the relationship between workplace incivility and OCBI, offering deeper insight into moderating mechanism that may exist within this relationship.

In summary, despite numerous studies conducted on workplace incivility, there remains a significant research gap that warrants further research. Using Social Exchange Theory, workplace incivility is expected to have negative impact on employees' OCBI. Based on previous studies and Affective Events Theory, this relationship may be mediated by emotions such as anger, embarrassment, hurt feelings, and contempt. Additionally, based on Conservation of Resources Theory, the strength of the relationship between workplace incivility and OCBI may depend on hostile attribution bias. Therefore, this study will address the following research questions: Does workplace incivility affect employees' OCBI directly and indirectly through anger, embarrassment, hurt feelings, and contempt? Does hostile attribution bias moderate the relationship between workplace incivility and OCBI?

#### **1.4 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES**

This study aims to examine the effect of workplace incivility on OCBI among Malaysian employees. In addition, this study also examines the mediation and moderation effects of several selected variables. Specifically, the objectives of this study are as follows:

1. To examine the relationship between workplace incivility and OCBI.
2. To examine the mediating effect of anger on the relationship between workplace incivility and OCBI.
3. To examine the mediating effect of embarrassment on the relationship between workplace incivility and OCBI.
4. To examine the mediating effect of hurt feelings on the relationship between workplace incivility and OCBI.
5. To examine the mediating effect of contempt on the relationship between workplace incivility and OCBI.
6. To examine the moderating effect of hostile attribution bias on the relationship between workplace incivility and OCBI.

#### **1.5 SCOPE OF THE STUDY**

This study aims to investigate the relationship between workplace incivility and organizational citizenship behaviour, with a focus on the mediating role of emotions and the moderating influence of hostile attribution bias. Specifically, this study examines how workplace incivility affects target's emotional responses, particularly feelings of anger, embarrassment, hurt feelings, and contempt, and how these emotions in turn influence their organizational citizenship behaviour directed towards the instigator (OCBI). Additionally, the study examines how individual differences in attribution orientation, particularly hostile attribution bias moderate the relationship

between workplace incivility and OCBI. Social Exchange Theory (Blau 1964), Affective Events Theory (Weiss & Cropanzano 1996), and Conservation of Resources Theory (Hobfoll & Lerman 1989) are used in this study to explain the relationship among variables. All these relationships are discussed as part of the literature review in the next chapter.

## 1.6 CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE STUDY

This study provides several theoretical contributions. First, this study is expected to broaden the understanding of the tit-for-tat exchanges of workplace incivility by showing that employees may respond to uncivil behavior in the form of withholding his or her voluntary behavior. Based on Social Exchange Theory (Blau 1964), this study will extend research on workplace incivility by examining workplace incivility-OCBI relationship. Although Andersson and Pearson (1999) suggested that workplace incivility could escalate into intense coercive behavior, there is also a possibility that employees may respond in more covert retaliation. Therefore, findings from this study will add to the existing body of knowledge on the tit-for-tat exchanges of workplace incivility.

Second, this study extends the list of discrete emotions in workplace incivility research to include contempt as a potentially emotional response to workplace incivility. Drawing from Affective Events Theory (Weiss & Cropanzano 1996), workplace incivility is expected to elicit contempt among targets in responding to the negative treatment. To the best of my knowledge, there is no study that has been done in which contempt has been examined as one of the emotional reactions to workplace incivility phenomenon. Using Affective Events Theory (Weiss & Cropanzano 1996), anger, embarrassment, and hurt feelings are also proposed to mediate the relationship between workplace incivility and OCBI. Therefore, by examining emotions as the mediating mechanism, this study will answer the call by Kabat-Farr et al. (2018) and Ashkanasy and Dorris (2017) to further study the role of discrete emotions in workplace incivility research.

Third, by examining anger, embarrassment, hurt feelings, and contempt constructs in one single framework, it will extend the understanding of how employees'

response to workplace incivility. Despite being mentioned in early workplace incivility studies (e.g., Hershcovis et al. 2017; Ismail et al. 2018; Porath & Pearson 2012), anger, embarrassment, hurt feelings, and contempt constructs have yet to be tested as mediators in one single framework. Since experiencing real-life events such as workplace incivility often involves multiple emotions (Pearson et al. 2001), examining a range of emotions can provide a more nuanced understanding of how these emotions influence employees' behaviour and outcomes in the workplace. Examining multiple mediators, therefore, would increase the information obtained from a research study and provide a more accurate assessment of mediation effects in research (MacKinnon et al. 2007).

Fourth, by including individual difference variables such as hostile attribution bias in the relationship between workplace incivility and OCBI, it will provide more insight into employees' reactions to uncivil experiences. Although researchers have examined the role of individual differences as the moderating variables, little attempt has been made to include hostile attribution bias as moderating variable within workplace incivility studies. A notable exception is the work of Wu et al. (2014) and Zhou et al. (2015), which examined the moderating role of hostile attribution bias on the relationship between workplace incivility and its outcomes (e.g., interpersonal deviance and end-of-work negative effect). In doing so, findings from this study will add to the existing body of knowledge on the individual difference variables that may affect incivility tit-for-tat exchanges of workplace incivility as suggested by Andersson and Pearson (1999).

With regard to the managerial contribution, first, this study may be helpful for employers, managers, and human resource practitioners to foster civility in the organization. Results of this study are expected to shed some light on the important consequences of workplace incivility on employees and organizations. Given the high cost associated with workplace incivility, it is important for an organization to take measures that could reduce workplace incivility. For instance, an organization can encourage civility by creating a guideline for managers and employees that provide detailed information on workplace incivility, civility, and the escalation of incivility, as well as the resolution process. Hence, based on these findings it is expected employers

could use the information in creating a positive work environment that encourages civility and mutual respect among employees.

Second, the expected findings from this study may also inform the employers, managers, and human resource practitioners on the negative emotional responses caused by workplace incivility. Although workplace incivility is subtle, being treated uncivilly could become a possible source of emotional disruption at work. Based on the findings of the study, it is expected that the employers could use the information to help the employees manage their negative emotions. For instance, employers may develop stress management intervention such as counselling session and stress management workshop that may help employees to manage their emotions. With these programs, it will help the employees to understand, control, and deal with their emotions.

Third, the results of this study will highlight the importance of managing perception among employees. Because workplace incivility is based on individual perception, one may perceive that other people treat them negatively even though they do not. Due to negative perception, there is a possibility that the blaming person could suffer the consequences of the coworker's retaliation even though he or she had done nothing wrong. Thus, employers, managers, and human resource practitioners should take appropriate actions to help reducing wrong perceptions and misunderstanding among employees.

## **1.7 DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS**

*Workplace incivility* refers to “low-intensity deviant behavior with ambiguous intent to harm the target, in violation of workplace norms for mutual respect. Uncivil behaviors are characteristically rude and discourteous, displaying a lack of regard for others” (Andersson & Pearson 1999: 457).

*Coworker* refers to someone who works closely with another worker, who holds a similar position or rank to that employee within the same organization (Yoon & Thye 2000).

*OCBI* refers to voluntary work behaviors directed toward the instigator within the organization (Williams & Anderson 1991).

*Anger* refers to negative emotion encountered by people in response to a perceived threat to oneself (Blair 2012).

*Embarrassment* refers to negative emotion encountered by people due to a threat upon one's social image that creates a concern of how one is being appraised by others (Edelmann 1981:1985).

*Hurt feelings* refers to negative emotion encountered by people as a result of an individual being emotionally wounded or injured by another (Vangelisti & Young 2000).

*Contempt* refers to negative emotion elicited by one's perception that the other person is an inferior human being because of that person behavior (Fisher 2011; Fisher & Roseman 2007).

*Hostile attribution bias* refers to a person's tendency to appraise the behavior of others as hostile (Adams & John 1997).

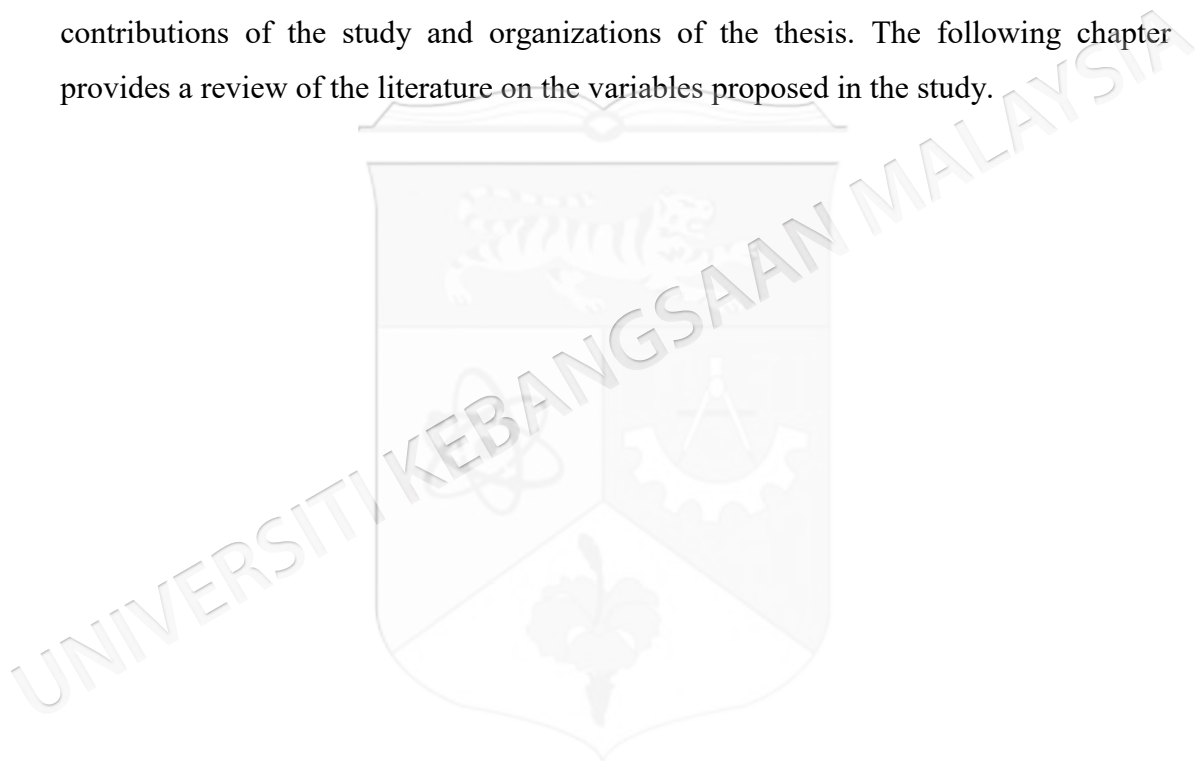
## **1.8 ORGANIZATION OF THE STUDY**

This study is organized into six chapter. Chapter one provides the introduction of background of the research, research problem, research objectives, contributions of the study, and definition of key terms. Chapter two provides a review of the underpinning theories used in this study, which are the Social Exchange Theory, Affective Events Theory, and Conservation of Resources Theory. It also provides an overview of the selected study variables, which are workplace incivility, OCB and discrete emotions comprising anger, embarrassment, hurt feelings, and contempt, as well as hostile attribution bias. Chapter three reviews the theoretical rationale and empirical evidence to justify the hypothesized relationships among the study variables and presents the proposed conceptual framework. Chapter four explains the research design and method for collecting data, analysis and hypothesis testing. Chapter five discusses the findings

of the study based on the statistical analysis. Finally, chapter six discusses the findings of the study, theoretical and practical implications, limitations and suggestion for future research.

## **1.9 SUMMARY**

This chapter provides an overview of the study and discusses on the need to examine workplace incivility phenomenon among employees in organizations. Several research gaps in workplace incivility literature were highlighted. Based on the perceived gaps, research questions and objectives were developed. The chapter concludes with contributions of the study and organizations of the thesis. The following chapter provides a review of the literature on the variables proposed in the study.



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