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A call for transformation: Exit, Voice, Loyalty and Neglect (EVLN) in response to workplace incivility

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Abstract.
BACKGROUND: Interrelations between incivility and its precursors or consequences, as well as the role of these interrelations in employees' reactions to incivility are still poorly understood.
OBJECTIVE: The purpose of the present study was to assess different reactions to workplace incivility while identifying specific and individual-based appraisals and emotions associated with these reactions.
METHOD: A qualitative research approach using semi-structured in-depth interviews, with a sample of 42 employees in a beverage manufacturing corporation in Israel to capture employees' voices regarding their incivility experiences.
RESULTS: Analysis of the interviews indicated four reaction-categories: (1) Exit; (2) Voice; (3) Loyalty; and (4) Neglect, in line with the theoretical EVLN model for describing reactions to stressful conditions. In particular, the interviews revealed a dynamic reaction process and suggested that intentionality of reaction provides a third, new dimension. Additionally, an underlying emotional process rooted in appraisals and aroused emotions was evident in each of the reactions.
CONCLUSIONS: Organizations that wish to reduce incivility events may wish to examine the emotions of targets of incivility, explore the underlying appraisals associated with these emotions, and be mindful of the dynamic and highly individual reaction processes involved.

Keywords: Mistreatment, workplace emotions, exit/voice/loyalty/neglect model, appraisals, work-related stress

1. Introduction

Interrelations between incivility and its precursors or consequences, as well as the role of these interrelations in employees' reactions to incivility are still poorly understood despite increased recent interest in the topic from a wide range of organizations and researchers [1]. In particular, scant evidence exists concerning processes that elicit these reactions [2]. To date, studies of incivility have focused either on distinct consequences of workplace incivility, [3] or independently, on a variety of precursors to incivility [4]. However, the role of such precursors in all-inclusive incivility processes has been mostly neglected [2].

The Exit, Voice, Loyalty and Neglect (EVLN) model [5], designed to model reactions to stressful situations, has been used to capture reactions to different organizational conditions that are at times adverse [6]. Until now most empirical studies of reactions to workplace incivility have focused on different manifestations of *exit* and *neglect* reactions [1] and have neglected the role of *voice* and *loyalty*.

Furthermore, incivility is clearly an emotional process and appraisals have been noted to form the basis for emotions [7]. Yet, only a few studies to

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date have focused on the links between emotional appraisals and responses to incivility. Such studies [8, 9] have typically examined emotional experiences as detached from behavioral responses, thus overlooking the potential to integrate emotions, appraisals, and behaviors into a single, comprehensive model, with uncivil acts as the initial trigger and one or more of the EVLN reactions as the outcome. Finally, incivility was studied mainly quantitatively, not allowing employees' voices to be expressed.

In light of the importance of understanding and coping with incivility, the present study assesses different reactions to workplace incivility while identifying specific and individual-based appraisals and emotions associated with these reactions. In doing so, the study bolsters and expands the theoretical basis for the EVLN model and provides a comprehensive framework that would allow the consideration of reactions to workplace incivility as part of an all-inclusive process.

2. Theoretical background

2.1. Defining incivility

Incivility was first defined by Andersson and Pearson as "low-intensity deviant behavior with ambiguous intent to harm the target, in violation of workplace norms for mutual respect" [10] (p. 457). More recently, Pearson and Porath defined incivility as "the exchange of seemingly inconsequential inconsiderate words and deeds that violate conventional norms of workplace conduct" [11] (p.12), thus allowing for the exclusion of the often-unmeasured intentionality as part of the definition [12]. Pearson and Porath clearly state that incivility is subjective [11], aligning their definition with other recent definitions of adverse interpersonal relationships constructs that view the perspectives of targets of incivility as an organizing framework [12]. For the most part, incivility has been described as a set of subtle, inappropriate, rude and disrespectful behaviors [11, 13], either active, as in the case of belittling comments or demeaning remarks, or passive, as in the case of ignoring employees or overlooking their work [1].

2.2. Implications of incivility

Employees react emotionally, attitudinally, and/or behaviorally to incivilities, in manners that may sidetrack them from their work [1]. Schilpzand et al. presented a list of reactions to incivility, with some reactions suggesting a withdrawal (i.e. *exit*) response [1]. In their studies, withdrawal reactions were noted to include reduced engagement, [14], absenteeism [15], turnover intentions [16], and turnover [3, 17], or negative impacts on job performance, both in-role and innovative [18]. Other reactions centered on expressions of active deviancy, namely *neglect* toward the organization [19] or towards colleagues [4].

Studies that examined motivations for incivility and subsequent reactions and implications have identified emotions as a key variable in incivility-related processes [20], in accordance with recent literature that highlighted the central role of emotions in the workplace experience and behavior [21]. Emotions contribute significantly to workplace outcomes, productivity, and achievements, and/or to satisfaction, relationships, and improved social climate [22].

More specifically, various studies have established positive relationships between experiences of workplace incivility and negative emotions [23], and in particular anger, sadness, and fear [3]. Schilpzand et al. [1], for example, cited higher levels of exhaustion [15], depression [24], burnout [17], and stress [25] in response to incivility. Furthermore, incivility has been correlated with reduced levels of energy [26], reduced optimism [20] and poorer well-being [26].

Despite an extensive inventory of reactions to workplace incivility, a comprehensive theoretical framework that captures the wide-ranging implications of incivility has only recently been presented [12]. Beyond its attention to the behavioral responses of targets of incivility, this new, EVLN-based conceptualization has focused on perceptual outcomes, such as withdrawal intentions and job insecurity perceptions. However, this newly-proposed theoretical framework has yet to be empirically assessed and it has not addressed the possible interrelations between perceptual, emotional, and behavioral responses to incivility [20, 23].

2.3. Reactions to stressful situations including incivility - initial model development

The need to cope with increasing work-related stress has become a pressing organizational concern [22]. Workplace violence and workplace incivility have been acknowledged as major sources of stress, and have been recently studied in the framework of work-related stress [22, 26]. Several theoretical models were proposed in order to conceptualize and map potential reactions to stressful situations [6].

Hirschman was the first to introduce a behavioral model that identified *Exit, Voice* and *Loyalty* as three possible responses to stressful situations. The Hirschman model defines the *exit* reaction as a departure from the organization/state (e.g. leaving an organization as a result of incivility) or as dispensing with their services, while the *voice* reaction, at the other end of the reaction spectrum, represents protest engagements aimed at amending unfavorable situations. Lastly, and driven by the high costs of the *exit* and *voice* responses [27] as well as by distress [28], the *loyalty* reaction offers an intermediate response [29] before choosing between *exit* and *voice* [5].

Farrell [5] extended Hirschman's [27] model to include dissatisfaction reactions among employees; shifting the focus from the macro level (i.e. employee-organization relations) to the micro level (i.e. dyadic relations). Farrell [5] was also the first to identify the *neglect* reaction and to include it in the extended *Exit, Voice*, *Loyalty* and *Neglect*) EVLN model. He suggested that the *neglect* response involves a wide variety of behaviors, such as tardiness, absenteeism and increased error rates [5]. This extended EVLN model also included two dimensions, the first, a constructive (*voice* and *loyalty*)/destructive (*exit* and *neglect*) dimension [5, 30], and the second an active/passive dimension. *Exit* and *voice* were classified as active responses, while *loyalty* and *neglect* were classified as passive responses [5, 29].

While the EVLN model, in its extended form, focused mostly on reactions to employee dissatisfaction [5, 30, 31], several studies have utilized it to address reactions to adversarial events in general [32], and in particular reactions to stress-related phenomena such as job insecurity [33] or psychological contract violations [28]. In some of these newer, alternative frameworks, the model received different, at times contradictory, interpretations that challenged its initial form. One such case was Rousseau's reinterpretation of the four categories of the EVLN model, whereby several reactions to psychological contract violation that had previously been considered constructive (e.g. [30]), were re-classified as destructive [28]. In particular, Rousseau [28] assigned a broader, partly destructive, interpretation to *loyalty*, suggesting that it was equivalent to *silence* and could imply inaction due to pessimism. Furthermore, *neglect* was reinterpreted by Rousseau to include more active and destructive reactions, such as vandalism and theft. Farrell and Rusbult suggested that *voice* (previously taken to represent constructive protest [28]), had the potential to represent a threat [30]. Considered together, it appears that rather than offering a broader interpretation to the original EVLN model, Rousseau's work undermined it [28]. However, she has not been the first to do so. Earlier, Hirschman [27] indicated that *loyalty* could stem from a limited ability to *exit* or to raise one's *voice* [12], thus implying that it could be motivated by weakness. Similarly, Hagedoorn et al. used internal consistency and validity data for the *voice* reaction scale to support their claims that *voice* reactions may take one of two forms: considerate or aggressive [32], with the latter characterized by aspirations to win rather than to ameliorate crisis situations [31]. These later claims challenged previous prevailing claims that placed aggressive *voice* at a juncture along the constructive-destructive axis. In accordance with these newer notions, Hsiung and Yang argued that "aggressive *voice* is less constructive than considerate *voice* but is more constructive than *exit,* because aggressive *voice* is still an effort to correct the problematic situation" [34] (p. 1890). As a result, Paillé, Grima and Dufour found sufficient support for a more dynamic model in which *voice* and *loyalty* could play either passive or active roles [35]. Other authors further extended the EVLN model to include additional reactions to stress, such as *cynicism*, or to include subcategories, such as *imagined exit* or *brutal neglect* [6].

All these studies suggest that despite the illuminating contribution of the EVLN model to the understanding of human reactions to stressful conditions, and despite being initially considered a suitable framework for understanding incivility, the model's (mostly) rigid structure prevents it from being applied fully within the context of reactions to dynamic interpersonal adverse relations.

2.4. Emotions and EVLN

The EVLN model focuses on behavioral responses and does not address emotions. This contrasts with contemporary theories that place emotions at the centre of behavioural reactions within the context of dynamic stress processes [36] and workplace aggression [37]. Emotions provide invaluable self-information as well as information about various interactions between individuals and their environments [38]. Indeed, cognitive appraisals underlying emotions and emotional reactions are central to the study of emotional experiences [7]. According to the Theory of Cognitive Appraisal of Emotions [39], cognitive appraisals of stressful situations affect the ability to cope with these situations and in turn,

affects and motivates emotional arousal and action tendencies.

Cognitive appraisals and coping mediate between people and their environments. Cognitive appraisals denote a process by which individuals assess why and to what extent social encounters are stressful, whereas coping describes processes by which individuals manage the demands of the person-environment relationships and the emotions involved [7]. Psychological stress occurs when individuals appraise relationships with their environments as potentially damaging to their well-being [39]. These appraisals, in turn, elicit negative emotions [36]. In particular, it has been argued that incivility-related negative emotions and reactions are induced by negative appraisals of uncivil behaviours [3, 9, 40].

Zeidner et al. argued that targets of incivility attribute meanings to uncivil events, and that these meanings trigger emotions which may reduce the targets' work efficiency, provoke a tendency to leave organizations, or lead to deliberate, more extreme, actions such as sabotage and other behavioural expressions of anger [22]. Beyond these observations, Zeidner et al. noted the central role of stress in incivility-related experiences. They suggested three main stress-coping strategies that underlie reactions to incivility and closely match the EVLN model. These strategies included problem-focused strategies involving active attempts to change adverse situations (corresponding to *voice*); emotion-focused strategies whereby stress is endured and tolerated (corresponding to *loyalty*); and avoidance-focused strategies, whereby targets choose to ignore incivility-induced stress or to avoid it (corresponding to both *exit* and *loyalty*) [22]. Despite being closely aligned with the EVLN model, these three strategies have not yet been incorporated into the EVLN structure.

3. Method

3.1. Background

The study was conducted in a large food and beverage manufacturing corporation in Israel that employs about 5,000 staff in six autonomous factories throughout the country, each with its own line of products.

3.2. Participants, research tools and procedure

3.2.1. Participants

Participants (N = 42) included eight to 12 general employees and mid-management staff in four of the main company factories. In each factory, participants were selected according to availability at the time of the study, thus reducing selection bias and strengthening reliability. The age of the participants ranged between 25 and 65, and employment at the company ranged between six months and 38 years. Eight of the participants were women and the rest were men, reflecting the ratio in the organization.

3.2.2. Research tools

Semi-structured, in-depth interviews served as the main research tool in the present study Such interviews have been shown to provide researchers with rich and varied data, which, in turn, allows for in depth analysis and identification of existing patterns [41] In the present study, the interviews focused on participants' perceptions of incivility in the workplace and on employees' reactions to manifestations of incivility. Sample questions: What emotions do you experience at work? Have you experienced or witnessed acts of incivility in your department?

3.2.3. Procedure

Interviews with participants were conducted by five skilled interviewers over a period of one month. All interviews were held on company grounds in dedicated rooms, allowing for privacy and facilitating active dialogues between participants and interviewers.

Permission to conduct the study was obtained from the vice-CEO of the corporation and from the heads of each of the HR departments, respectively. All participants were required to sign informed-consent forms. Prior to submitting these forms, the researchers assured participants that participation in the study was voluntary, that refusal to participate would have no effect on their careers, and that confidentiality and anonymity would be maintained throughout all stages of the study. All references to personal data were omitted from research records.

3.3. Data analysis

Data from interview transcripts were organized and analyzed using a thematic content analysis approach as described by Weber and following a clearly defined and methodical procedure [42]. Each transcript was analyzed and coded separately in order to identify emerging themes. Sections or quotes were repeatedly compared with others in order to determine whether they should share the same code. Cross interview cat-

egories, or families, were then constructed, and codes were again compared in order to ensure that items were properly sorted and coded. To increase trustworthiness [43], a full independent thematic analysis of data from all 42 interviews was conducted by each of the three authors. Results were then shared between the authors, and the emerging themes were jointly examined in order to reach an agreement between codes and data.

4. Results

Interviews with participants revealed a wide range of complex, personal and dynamic experiences, and a similarly wide range of reactions to incivility. A variety of underlying appraisals, emotions and themes were noted. Four main themes were identified, in line with the four main EVLN reactions to incivility. These themes were each manifested in one of two broad patterns of responses, drawing from three dimensions = (and altogether six sub-themes). Two of these dimensions loosely corresponded to the previously-recognized dimensions of passive/active and constructive/destructive responses, but a third, dimension of intentionality: intentional-controlled/unintentional-impulsive, was also identified. Altogether, the themes and subthemes that were identified based on the analysis of the interviews included: *Loyalty* (acceptance and tolerance), *Voice* (intentional and assertive/unintentional and impulsive), *Exit* (intentional and controlled/unintentional and impulsive) and *Neglect*, (reduced work effectiveness and revenge intentions) Furthermore, in contrast with the previously described more rigid view of the EVLN model [6, 34, 35], the present findings point to a dynamic model. This dynamic nature of the EVLN reactions is the fifth theme that emerged from our data analysis.

4.1. Overview

The interviews revealed that incivility was prevalent in the organization and was perpetrated mainly by senior individuals in the organization, in line with existing literature [11]. Reported uncivil behaviors included raising one's voice and/or speaking rudely; unjustified, outright accusations and criticism related to work performance; ignoring and dismissing employees' concerns; and, to a lesser degree, using excluding language and favoritism: "*Whenever I say something she [the manager] considers wrong ... I pay for it ... she throws a tantrum and starts shouting ... "* (25).

Incivility induced stress and hadwide-ranging impacts on employees, including physical, psychological, work-related and family-related consequences: "*These things [incivility and subsequent emotional responses] affect me very badly ... I become physically ill"* (1).

4.2. Behavioral reactions, appraisals, and emotions

Based on the interview data, the principal behavioral reactions to uncivil behaviors generally fit into the four 'classical' facets of the EVLN model typically used in stressful situations; albeit in its nuanced or more detailed form: Leaving, intentions to leave (planned leaving), or imagined leaving (*exit*); Protest reactions directed at perpetrators of incivility or at others (*voice*); Acceptance or tolerance of uncivil behaviors (*loyalty*); Poorer work performance or vengeful actions (*neglect*). However, reactions were found to be dynamic and did not match the previously-described active/passive and/or constructive/destructive rigid dimensions associated with the EVLN model in its classical form. Furthermore, a new dimension of *intentionality* in response to incivility emerged, ranging from intentional (controlled) to unintentional (uncontrolled) reactions.

Finally, each of the mentioned reactions to incivility involved an emotional process that, in turn, depended on appraisals. Indeed, appraisals emerged as a pivotal element in the participants' reactions to incivility and reflected the resources and perceived intentions of incivility perpetrators as well as the perceived personal and organizational resources of the individual targets. In turn, appraisals elicited either passive or active emotions and stimulated behavioral reactions that were either constructive or destructive, active or passive, intentional or unintentional. Additionally, the above-noted dynamic interchange between the various four EVLN reactions, affected by the intensity and duration of the uncivil experience as well as by specifics within it.

The following section presents the detailed findings according to the conventional form of the EVLN model and the corresponding reaction categories: *Exit, Voice, Loyalty,* and *Neglect*. In particular, interactions are emphasized between the three elements under examination - appraisals, emotions, and reactions - for each of the four reaction categories.

4.2.1. Loyalty

In this type of reaction to incivility, participants mostly chose not to voice their feelings and thoughts, to stay in their place of work, and to 'put up' with uncivil behaviors. Two broad patterns of loyalty-based reactions were identified: *acceptance and tolerance*.

Acceptance: Acceptance reactions were typified by an effort to understand the origins of uncivil behaviors and by the subsequent acceptance of such behaviors. Accordingly, these reactions allowed targets of incivility to overcome uncivil slights, to sustain their work effort, and to maintain acceptable work-performance levels.

These types of reactions were more frequent in response to uncivil behaviors from direct managers with whom participants were more familiar and/or had long-term relationships. Such participants, who were in regular/close contact with the perpetrators, tended to attribute some of the uncivil behaviors to the perpetrators' situational factors (such as routine daily demands, work overload, and/or pressures due to disagreements with higher management). Similarly, some participants attributed uncivil behaviors from direct managers to personal factors perceived by them to be beyond the perpetrators' control (such as low stress tolerance, high motivation and responsibility, or leadership style), and hoped for corrective experiences to take place: "*He [the manager] doesn't do it [act in an uncivil manner] on purpose, he is stressed, that's all. He may become annoyed, for a little while, and then it's over"* (18); "*I appreciate him and I think he is smart . . . So I 'bear it' [the uncivil behaviors] and I choose not to argue"* (10).

Acceptance reactions were typically associated with low-level, short-term, passive and negative emotions: "*We may feel offended for a short while but then we straighten things out . . . and we move on"* (18). Sometimes, more positive and passive emotions, such as understanding and empathy, were described: "*When people care about their work . . . they may argue and raise their voices. It happens to me too, so I can understand and accept it"* (20).

Tolerance: While acceptance-type *loyalty* reactions were often intentional with respondents making an effort to understand and accept adverse situations, tolerance-type *loyalty* reactions emerged as less intentional 'default' reactions, manifested in avoidance, passive acceptance of situations, and tolerance of uncivil behaviors (sometimes described by participants as '*lowering their heads'*). Participants who displayed such reactions to incivility continued to work while trying, often unsuccessfully, to maintain the quality of their work and their own well-being: "*I try to do my job and to avoid contact [with incivility perpetrators] . . .* " (21).

Similar to instances associated with acceptance *loyalty* reactions, participants that recounted tolerance *loyalty* reactions considered uncivil behaviors were due to perpetrators' situational or personal attributes. However, they did not find uncivil behaviors to be justified by the above factors, but rather appraised them as offensive and preventable: "*When something happens, she [the manager] comes right at you. If she is having a bad day . . . we suffer . . . It is unacceptable, She is the manager, she should know better"* (38). Participants' tolerance reactions typically related to the combined and sometimes synergetic effect of interactions between self–appraisals and appraisals of perpetrators.

Situational self-appraisals that were linked with tolerance *loyalty* reactions included a perceived lack of personal choice stemming from love of the job or the organization, or *exit* costs, such as expected levels of employability, the availability of attractive alternatives, or economic and familial constraints: "*I love my job... and it suits me well in terms of hours and salary. I'm a single mother with three children; I need the salary . . .* " (18). Other self-appraisals included low social-emotional personal resources, such as low assertiveness, low self-confidence, introversion, or else a tendency to avoid confrontations: "*I never talk... not with anyone . . . not about the offenses and the attitudes towards me and not about how I feel . . . I deal with all of it on my own"* (1).

Tolerance-related appraisals were often accompanied by perceptions of the offender as powerful and resistant to change, and a perceived lack of organizational support: "*Whenever I turn to my manager [to complain about another manager] he tells me: You are a manager yourself, deal with it . . . So I don't turn to him anymore"* (3).

Appraisals associated with tolerance reactions were often followed by high-level, negative, long-lasting, and mainly passive emotions such as fear (e.g. of upcoming threats or of actual attacks against participants' safety, job security or professional status), stress, sadness (accompanied by a sense of loss), despair, helplessness, hopelessness, and a general fatigue: "*People are afraid to lose their jobs . . . although they say that they had enough with what they go through . . . "* (15); "*I didn't complain [about instances of incivility] because I was worried that it*

might backfire. In fact, I was sure it would come right back at me".

Such emotions were sometimes coupled with more active, yet suppressed, emotions, such as anger*; "The guys, they all hear it [the boss shouting at a worker]... and this worker is all angry and upset. But he can't retaliate. He is afraid . . .* " (15). Attesting to the dynamic aspects of the EVLN reaction process, such active emotions often led to other types of reactions such as *exit* or *voice*.

4.2.2. Voice

Voice reactions included acts of protests or direct confrontations with perpetrators, and to a lesser degree, complaints to higher management. Such reactions were employed in an effort to prevent future incivility acts, or, more generally, to seek personal justice, and as a manifestation of the participants' belief in a just world: "*Psychologically speaking, once I shout at you and you don't react, you have given me the green light to shout"* (38); "*It doesn't seem to be appropriate behavior and [whenever it happens] I stand up and I speak against it . . . "* (7). Participants using this reaction appraised the perpetrators as responsible for their actions, the situation as unjust and mendable, and typically reported active emotions, such anger, a strong sense of injustice and unfairness, frustration, as well as a sense of hope and optimism (that things can be changed), and a sense of choice. *Voice* reactions were found to be either intentional and assertive, or unintentional and impulsive.

Intentional and assertive voice reactions were planned in advance, carried out with care, and were usually regarded as more effective: *"I told him [the offending manager] I wanted to have a talk with him . . . . When he postponed the meeting, I wrote to him and explained [what the problem was] and finally he understood"* (7). Such a reaction was based on a positive self-appraisal, a sense of strength and confidence; in particular regarding availability of adequate personal resources to deal with incivility-related situations (such as communication skills and assertiveness), a sense of job security, availability of options, and/or organizational support.

Unintentional and impulsive voice reactions were described as the result of emotional hijacking and a fight reaction to threat: "*One day [after he was offending me] I just lost it . . . I let it all out, whatever came into my head at the moment"* (21). Such a reaction was described as typically not very effective in stopping incivility acts, leading to escalation, and/or to inflicting self-damage. Thus, some participants who had resorted to the impulsive unintentional *voice* reactions regretted the manner by which these reactions were expressed.

4.2.3. Exit

First-person reports of actual *exit* reactions in response to incivility (i.e. quitting) were rare. This scarcity was expected as the study was limited to staff that was still employed. However, a number of participants discussed thoughts of leaving the organization (imagined *exit*), while several others spoke of colleagues who had left the organization because of incivility, or who had expressed *exit* intentions.

Exit intentions and reactions were often associated with severe and repeated acts of incivility: "*All it takes is one person to poison the atmosphere [even if you like everything else about the place]*" (1). Here too, as in the *voice* reactions, the intentionality dimension was evident, with *exit* reactions following one of two main patterns: unintentional (impulsive) *exit* and intentional (despair) *exit*.

Intentional and controlled despair *exit* reactions included instances whereby participants '*gave up*' on the hope to mend the situation, made alternative plans, or stayed while waiting for an opportunity to leave: "*I don't think I can stand it [the uncivil acts] anymore . . . I really can't. I haven't realized it until now, but I don't think I can stand it much longer . . . I feel that it's time for me to move on"* (1). In such cases, the situation was appraised as immutable and unbearable, perpetrators' uncivil behavior considered intentional and perpetual, and organizational support was described as lacking.

Emotions with intentional *exit* reactions were mainly passive and included feelings such as insult, pain, deep sadness, and despair: "*I kept looking for another job. I couldn't continue . . . I felt insulted, personally, and it really hurt me. I didn't want to go to work anymore. It felt as though they could hang a sign at the entrance saying 'Arbeit macht frei' [Work liberates]*" (20).

Actual exit depended on the magnitude of the emotion coupled with perception of employability. The one participant who intended to leave had high employability, while one of those who imagined leaving said, "*If I could [leave], I wouldn't be here, that's all I can tell you. But I never studied and now I'm paying the price"* (23).

Conversely, typical *impulsive exit* reactions were unintentional, highly emotional, and demonstrated

a flight reaction. These reactions were experienced by participants who were deeply offended by the uncivil acts and wanted to leave the workplace immediately afterwards: "*I felt like leaving everything behind… and walking away*" (16). Most unintentional (impulsive) *exit* reactions were accompanied by active emotions, such as anger, an intense sense of insult, and frustration; the latter often additionally accompanied by a sense of injustice.

4.2.4. Neglect

Two leading *neglect* reactions to incivility emerged, reflecting the dual character of the intentionality dimension: *Reduced work effectiveness* was reported more frequently by participants and comprised a more passive and unintentional reaction, while *revenge intentions* were less frequently reported and represented a more active and intentional type of reaction. In both cases, incivility events were appraised as immutable, perpetrators' acts of incivility were appraised as intentional and/or perpetual, and targets' (participants') resources and the potential effectiveness of their other reactions were appraised as low.

The more frequently noted reduced work effectiveness was accompanied by passive and negative emotions such as despair, sadness, hopelessness, and fatigue. These affected work performance in various ways, including productivity, quality of work, teamwork, initiatives, innovations, engagement, and satisfaction: "*People [who experienced incivility] are unmotivated, they take long breaks, they invest less in their work… Some of the girls [who were targeted by incivility] get angry more easily and are less focused, they forget things*" (14).

Conversely, revenge intentions, were the least frequent reaction-pattern discussed in the interviews. They were typified by active negative emotions, such as anger and a sense of injustice that triggered active and deliberate wishes or intentions to reduce work effectiveness, and were designed to take revenge either on specific perpetrators or on the workplace in general: "*People may pass on data that is incomplete or submit incorrect information… on purpose … this can lead to quality failures, or to mechanical or safety problems*" (20); "*[Whenever I experience incivility] I feel like throwing down my earphones and walking away. I don't feel like answering any more calls even though answering calls is part of my job"* (40).

4.3. A dynamic process

The findings of this study indicated that the EVLN model is characterized by frequent and wide-ranging shifts between different types of reactions to incivility. For example, some participants had first responded to incidents of incivility with acceptance (*loyalty*) reactions but later felt that they could not continue in the same way and wished to *exit*, tried to *voice* their concerns, or resorted back to *loyalty,* opting not to react : *"I always put the company first [ahead of everything else], my first loyalty lay with them… but I can't tolerate it any more*". Others had responded to incivility first with protests (*voice*), but when these failed to bring positive impacts or worse led to negative impacts, they lost hope of changing the situation. Instead, they reacted with *tolerance* (*loyalty*) or *neglect*, or else wished to *exit*: "*Once you tried to talk [about specific uncivil behaviors] and it didn't help, you give up. You will no longer open up [and share your vulnerabilities] …* " (37).

Furthermore, many participants described complex responses to incivility, involving two or more of the EVLN reactions simultaneously. For example, tolerance (*loyalty*) type responses were combined with a wish to leave the organization (*exit*). In other reports, reduced work effectiveness (*neglect*) appeared alongside all other reactions.

5. Discussion

The concept of workplace incivility was first introduced by Andersson and Pearson [10]. Past research has focused on antecedents to workplace incivility and on the implications of uncivil encounters to both individuals and organizations. However, comprehensive models that represent employee voice and describe employees' reactions to incivility are lacking.

In several of the available studies, scholars have empirically differentiated behavioral reactions to incivility from emotional ones, and refrained from examining behaviors and emotions in tandem. Furthermore, researchers have overlooked the possibility that incivility is a dynamic, multi-stepped process, whereby uncivil events are followed by appraisals from target-individuals; that is, appraisals evoke emotions and emotions trigger reactions.

The present study aimed to address this empirical and theoretical void through capturing the voice of employees and their experiences of incivility.

Forty-two semi-structured personal interviews were conducted with randomly selected general and middle management employees of a large food and beverage company in Israel. Analysis of interview data in the present study revealed that reactions to incivility fell in line with the four categories of reactions to stress depicted by the EVLN model, namely *Exit*, *Voice*, *Loyalty*, and *Neglect* [33]. These findings bolster the EVLN reaction-to-stress model, extend it to reactions to workplace incivility, and are in line with previous findings that indicated incivility was one of the main sources of stress in workplace environments [22]. Furthermore, unlike previous evidence for rigid reaction modes, our findings indicate that EVLN reactions were dynamic and were underpinned by appraisals and emotions, in line with previous findings [3, 9, 40]. Lastly, we found that reactions to incivility included a third dimension of intentionality, beyond the previously noted dimensions of passive/active and constructive/destructive reactions.

While aligned with the EVLN model, we found reactions to workplace incivility were more nuanced and fell into specific sub-categories (or sub-themes) within the model's four major categories. First, we found that reactions associated with the *loyalty* category were divisible into two sub-categories: *acceptance* and *tolerance*. While Hirschman's [27] *loyalty* response was in line with an organizational target; that is, with 'being loyal to the organization', our findings demonstrated a more individual focus - an attempt to understand and rationalize perpetrators' motives in terms of situational pressures or personal attributes. Tolerance, the second sub-category of *loyalty,* was used to describe passive reactions related to a sense of powerlessness, while disapproving of the uncivil behavior. This subtype reaction resembled the *patience* reaction reported in Hagedoorn et al. [32]. However, while the latter assigned the *patience* reaction term to instances in which employees expected adversarial situations to improve, we found that tolerance reactions involved a sense of helplessness and hopelessness, in line with the findings of Rousseau [28], who identified *loyalty* as *silence* when referring to inaction due to pessimism.

In terms of the *voice* sub-categories: intentional (assertive) and unintentional (impulsive), while intentional *voice* reactions were found to be preplanned and aimed at rectifying offensive situations, unintentional *voice* reactions were spontaneous and were triggered by loss of temper and/or self-control. While somewhat similar to *the considerate voice* subcategory described as a stress reaction designed to benefit both opposing parties (a win-win strategy) by Hagedoorn et al. [32], assertive *voice* was described by our study participants as an effective communication strategy aimed at maximizing self-gains. Similarly, the spontaneous, uncontrolled, and impulsive *voice* reactions reported by our participants differed from the *aggressive voice* sub-category of Hagedoorn et al. [32], where the latter suggested choosing a planned strategy to win (a win-lose strategy). These differences in the findings of our study and prior research outcomes can be attributed in part to cultural differences. Israeli society is characterized by low power distance ([44] and by direct and expressive relationships [45], and these may be reflected in more impulsive *voice* responses to incivility.

Exit type reactions seemed to follow the definitions suggested in previous studies [30]. *Neglect* reactions were found to be more often passive, in line with Farrell and Rusbult [30], rather than active responses as suggested by Rousseau [28]. These passive *neglect* reactions can be attributed to the participants' general positive view of the organization as a whole and to high satisfaction levels.

5.1. A dynamic process

Our findings revealed a dynamic process in which shifts in reactions to incivility may take place according to specific situations, specific experiences, personal attributes of perpetrators and respondents, or the availability of support from others. Thus, the findings are in line with previous studies of the EVLN model within the context of dynamic reactions to stress, and extend them to instances of incivility. Farrell, for example, proposed that *loyalty* could be used as a temporary response to stress before choosing between *exit* and *voice* [5], while others considered *voice* a temporary response before expressing devotion [29]. Studies that have focused more on bullying or incivility suggest shifts in targets' responses to be either gradual and linear [46] or circular [32]. Our findings also support earlier findings that such shifts apply to incivility but indicate that shifts are not limited to the behavioral options of the original model, and that the direction of the shifts is not limited to the ones suggested by previous studies.

5.2. Intentionality as a third dimension

The nuanced reactions to incivility and the corresponding sub-categories of EVLN reactions identified in the present study all pointed to a new,

third dimension of the EVLN model, referred to here as intentionality. This dimension ranges from intentional to unintentional reactions and is closely related to emotion management. Intentionality interacts closely with the two EVLN dimensions: active/passive and constructive/destructive.

Assertive *voice*, acceptance *loyalty*, planned *exit*, and revenge intentions (*neglect*) were all intentional and controlled reactions, while impulsive *voice*, tolerance *loyalty*, impulsive *exit*, and (undeliberate) reduced work effectiveness were unintentional, and took place when employees lost control of a given situation.

5.3. The role of appraisals and emotions in determining reactions to incivility

The dynamic nature of reactions to incivility in the present study reflected underlying appraisals and emotions. Thus, the findings provide evidence of the centrality of emotions and appraisals in the incivility experience and of the benefits of extending Cognitive Appraisal Theory [7] to include incivility-related phenomena.

Overall, analysis of participants' reactions to incivility suggested a process involving appraisals and emotions, which in turn determined those reactions. Previous studies treated emotions and appraisals as detached from incivility reactions and discussed them only in terms of outcomes [3, 14–17]. For example, discussions of emotions in the context of incivility were mostly limited to their role as an outcome of uncivil events [15, 24, 25]; however, their contribution was acknowledged recently [47]. The current findings concur with those of Lazarus (1991), who placed both appraisals and subsequent emotions at the center of the underlying emotional process and resultant behavioral reactions [7].

In the present study, appraisals appeared to center on factors associated with perpetrators and targets, both separately and jointly. Perpetrator-associated factors included appraisals of perpetrators' personal attributes and appraisals of perpetrators' behaviors as intentional or situation-driven. Those factors interacted with target-associated factors, including personal and situational resources, personal attributes, and organizational support, to determine a range of emotions and emotional reactions. Indeed, in his discussion of the role of personal attributes of targets in reaction to incivility, Zhou argued that individual dispositions are likely to moderate the relationships between negative affective events of incivility and negative emotional reactions [9].

Incivility-related negative emotions could be categorized into passive and active emotions, leading to avoidance and withdrawal or to action; respectively. In particular, perceptions of perpetrators' behaviors as intentional were noted to negatively affect behaviors, well-being, and work outcomes.

Appraisals of low personal resources combined with perceptions of intentionality led to passive emotions such as sadness, hopelessness, helplessness, and fear that, in turn, led to intentional, tolerance *loyalty*-type reactions, including withdrawal, avoidance and surrender, as well as to reduced work effectiveness and to despair *exit*. Uncivil behaviors perceived as unintentional also triggered passive, although less negative, emotions that consequently led to acceptance *loyalty*-type responses.

Conversely, active emotions, such as anger, which were based on appraisals of intentionality and high personal resources in the perpetrators, led to actions, in particular to *voice* reactions (e.g. speaking up), and retaliation in the form of revenge and/or impulsive *exit*. This is in line with Zeidner et al., who reported that anger triggered by incivility could lead to revenge behaviors, including deliberate sabotage [22].

In the current study, while *voice* reactions relied mostly on active emotions and *loyalty* reactions relied on passive emotions, *exit* and *neglect* reactions were motivated by active and passive emotions and by underlying appraisals of either high or low personal resources; respectively.

Our findings further indicate that passive and active emotions may co-exist as part of a single reaction. For example, in certain instances anger was suppressed and accompanied by fear. This led to passive, tolerance *loyalty*-type reactions. This is in contrast with Philipe and Smith who argued that emotions and behaviours of victims tend to pair in a fixed pattern: fear with avoidance and anger with intervention [48]. Conversely, and in line with our findings, Lim et al. found that hostility could produce angry behaviours and withdrawal behaviours, and that individuals could cope with anger using what the authors termed "*anger-out*" or "*anger-in*" approaches; i.e., either expressing emotions through aggression or inhibiting them [8].

5.4. Limitations

Overall, the present study is the first to model reactions to workplace incivility and the processes

underlying such reactions using the employees' voice. The findings transform and extend the use of the EVLN model within the context of workplace incivility and highlight the complex and nuanced processes that underlie reactions to uncivil behaviours. However, notwithstanding these new insights, some research limitations should be noted.

First, as the study was conducted in a single organization and in a single country, results may not be generalized to employees in other organizations and/or other countries. Extending the study to other types of organizations, and to different cultures, could provide a wider view of the phenomena.

Second, the study utilized a qualitative approach, using interviews only to collect data. Use of additional, more varied survey approaches, or a mixed method approach, could lend more support to the present findings, and perhaps shed more light on the processes that underlie reactions to incivility.

In light of our findings, organizations that wish to reduce the incidence and magnitude of workplace incivility events, and the incidence and magnitude of ensuing negative reactions may wish to examine the emotions of targets of incivility. They may also explore the underlying appraisals associated with these emotions, be mindful of the dynamic and highly individual reaction processes involved, and provide support and training accordingly.

Conflict of interest

None to report.

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