

## **Low-quality LMX Relationships, Leader Incivility and Follower Responses**

Geir Thompson

Department of Leadership and Organisational Behaviour

BI Norwegian Business School

\*\*\*

Robert Buch

Oslo Business School

OsloMet – Oslo Metropolitan University

\*\*\*

Lars Glasø

Department of Leadership and Organisational Behaviour

BI Norwegian Business School

### Contact Information:

Geir Thompson  
Department of Leadership and Organisational Behaviour  
BI Norwegian Business School  
0484 Oslo  
Norway  
Phone: 004746410299  
E-mail: [geir.thompson@bi.no](mailto:geir.thompson@bi.no)

## **Low-quality LMX Relationships, Leader Incivility and Follower Responses**

Research on workplace mistreatment over the last 15 years has developed constructs (Hershcovis, 2011) such as social undermining (Duffy, Ganster, & Pagon, 2002), victimization (Aquino et al., 1999), abusive supervision (Tepper, 2000), bullying (e.g., Rayner, 1997), and mobbing (Leymann, 1990). Although there is definitional, conceptual and measurement overlap (Hershcovis, 2011), these concepts have key distinguishing features. Incivility is defined as disrespectful low-intensity deviant behavior with ambiguous intent to harm the target (Andersson & Pearson, 1999), and is distinct from explicit acts of aggression that convey unambiguous negative intent, such as abusive supervision, with a sustained display of hostile verbal and nonverbal behavior (Tepper, 2000). The label 'workplace bullying' refers to instances where an employee repeatedly over time is exposed to negative acts (Einarsen, 2000). This type of mistreatment is of a higher order than incivility because of its persistence and frequency. Social undermining is still another type of workplace mistreatment, which, in contrast to incivility where the intent is ambiguous, assumes positive intent by the perpetrator (Hershcovis, 2011) to hinder the ability to establish and maintain positive interpersonal relationships, work related success, and favorable reputation (Duffy, Ganster, & Pagon, 2002).

In a recent review on incivility, Schilpzand, De Pater, and Erez (2016) posit that most studies on incivility have investigated outcomes of workplace incivility rather than its antecedents. The few studies conducted on antecedents have focused on (1) Dispositional antecedents, which show that individual difference variables such as age, gender, and disagreeable and neurotic behavior are related to workplace incivility (Lim & Lee, 2011). (2) Behavioral antecedents, such as organizational and interpersonal counterproductive behavior, and a dominating or low integrating conflict management style, both found to predict incivility (Meyer & Spector, 2013). (3) Contextual antecedents, focused on workgroup norms for civility and role stressors that reduce experienced

incivility (Walsh et al., 2012). According to Schilpzand, et al. (2016), the question still largely unexplored is why certain antecedent conditions result in higher levels of incivility. Only work by Milam, et al. (2009) has investigated why certain dispositional personality characteristics, such as disagreeable and neurotic coworkers, would result in higher levels (Schilpzand, et al., 2016). The present study addresses this question by focusing on followers' relationship with their supervisor. This relationship is associated with work assignments, promotion, financial well-being, and competition for status and resources, to create a powerful and very significant on-going dynamic for the followers. As such, supervisor incivility is more consequential than co-worker incivility, and therefore our focus in this study. To address our research question, we use leader member exchange theory (LMX), developed by Graen and Uhl-Bien (1995), to identify the quality of the relationship between followers and their leader, and explore whether low-quality LMX is associated with leader incivility. Hence, our first task is to investigate whether supervisors with low-quality relationships with their followers will be more inclined to display incivility. By focusing on this important relationship our intent is to extend the line of research to provide avenues for causal studies in developing preventative policies and interventions.

The second aim of the present study is to explore uncharted outcomes of uncivil behavior. Extant research on incivility has addressed affective, attitudinal, cognitive and behavioral outcomes (Schilpzand, et al., 2016). These authors suggest further research should include mediators of incivility, which our study now aims to identify. We build on Andersson and Pearson (1999), who developed a theoretical framework which views incivility as a social interaction between two or more parties, displays how incivility spirals begin, and how they can potentially escalate into an exchange of coercive actions within an organization. Particular focus is on the interplay between negative affect and uncivil behavior. Research on affective outcomes has found incivility to be associated with increased anger, fear, and sadness (Porath & Pearson, 2012); lower levels of energy (Giumetti et al., 2013); increased levels of stress (Adams & Webster, 2013); and decreased levels of

well-being (Lim & Cortina). The present study expands this stream of research by addressing followers' feelings and/or beliefs concerning their relationship with their *organization*. We assume such an attitude towards their own organization will develop because their managers not only serve as administrative agents, but also fulfil an important symbolic role by modelling organizations' aspirations and values, which affects followers' attitudes toward their organization (Shoss, Eisenberger, Restubog, & Zagenczyk, 2013). By displaying uncivil behaviours which violate norms of mutual respect, supervisors trigger negative work-related attitudes such as lowering willingness to exert extra effort on behalf of the organization. We apply organizational commitment (OC) as an untested affective mediator, as OC reflects the relative strength of an individual's identification with and involvement in a particular organization (Meyer & Allen, 1991). Furthermore, in accordance with the Andersson and Pearson (1999) framework, we use OC as a mediator and examine potential dysfunctional consequences of followers' negative attitude towards their own organization. We examine whether followers will harm the organization by withholding effort or 'social loafing.' According to Chidambaram and Tung (2005), social loafers tend to exert less effort when working collectively. They intentionally decrease the effort, time and quality put into their work, especially where individual output is difficult to identify and when they expect other team members to perform well (Karau & Williams, 1993). By selecting social loafing as a counterproductive behavioral response, we include more active resistance behaviors into the extant literature, as previous research has focused largely on behavioral responses like turnover intention (Wilson & Holmvall, 2013), heightened level of absenteeism (Sliter, Sliter, Withrow & Jex, 2012), and organizational exit (Porath & Pearson, 2012). Even though social loafing has been linked to important outcomes, studies examining its antecedents have been confined to laboratory settings (see George, 1992, 1995) and may have omitted critical predictors of social loafing in the workplace (Comer, 1995). Therefore, it is important to study antecedents of social loafing in actual work groups (Murphy, Wayne, Liden, & Erdogan, 2003). In addition, and as argued by Liden,

Wayne, Jaworski, and Bennett (2004), the identification of the antecedents of social loafing are particularly important since organizations rely on groups to function well and perform at high levels. In addressing these issues, we apply Andersson and Pearson's (1999) theory on incivility as a conceptual framework summarizing the potential effect of incivility in the workplace. Their theory integrates existing organizational theories that relate to incivility, and identifies specific, testable hypotheses involving antecedents of incivility, and how incivility relates to affective and behavioral outcomes. In doing so, we also answer the call for more research into the intermediate linkages between incivility and outcomes (for example, from Schilpzand, et al., 2016), which allows for more exact theory building and theory testing that could broaden the field of workplace incivility. Knowing *why* a process occurs is also of practical importance since it allows us to create guidelines for reducing the negative implications of workplace incivility.

### **LMX and incivility**

According to LMX theory, leaders have limited resources to distribute among followers, and therefore develop particular interpersonal relationships with individual subordinates (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). An important contribution to the initial empirical work on LMX was the recognition of in-groups and out-groups as two distinct social structures, that once emerged, will remain stable and predictive of leader and member behavior over time (Graen & Cashman, 1975). Contemporary approaches to LMX rely increasingly on social exchange theory and assume that these relationships fall on a single continuum which ranges from high-quality social exchange relationships to low-quality economic exchange, or transactional exchange, relationships (e.g. Bernerth, Armenakis, Feild, Giles, & Walker, 2007; Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). Recent research demonstrates that transactional, or economic LMX relationship are associated with lower work performance and organizational commitment (Buch, Thompson, and Kuvaas, 2016; Kuvaas, Buch, Dysvik & Haerem, 2012). Similarly, social exchange researchers have argued that "high economic exchange should serve to undermine affective commitment and increase turnover intentions by

emphasizing formal and contractual relations, especially since, unlike social exchange, economic exchange does not involve the consideration of employee needs and preferences” (Shore, Bommer, Rao, and Seo, 2009, p. 703). Indeed, as pointed out by Graen and Uhl-Bien (1995), a follower in a more transactional LMX relationships is probably motivated by “...the satisfaction of his/ her own self-interests, without consideration of the good of the group” (p. 232). Furthermore, it is reasonable to assume that followers who fail to meet performance and don’t consider the good of the group cause supervisors frustration and disappointment, and perceive these employees as annoying and difficult to work with, which then react with incivil behavior. Accordingly, the above theorizing and empirical findings suggests that supervisors with low-quality relationships with their followers should be more inclined to display incivility. Conversely, with higher levels of LMX This leads us to our first hypothesis:

*Hypothesis 1: More transactional LMX relationships are positively associated with leader incivility.*

### **Follower response to incivility**

Andersson and Pearson (1999) view incivility as a social interaction between two or more parties, where this dynamic interchange can potentially escalate into an exchange of coercive actions within an organization. As such, the negative action of one party leads to the negative reaction of the second party, increasing again to counterproductive behaviors where the obvious intent is to harm. Specifically, incivility, as a breach of norms of mutual respect, can create negative affect and stimulate reciprocity against the perceived unfair act. We therefore examine organizational commitment (OC) as an untested affective mediator. OC is defined as the relative strength of an individual’s identification with and involvement in a particular organization (Meyer & Allen, 1991). It is a multidimensional construct consisting of three principal dimensions; (a) value commitment, which refers to a strong belief in and acceptance of organizational goals and

values; (b) willingness to exert effort on behalf of the organization, and (c) attachment or intention to maintain membership in the organization (Meyer & Allen, 1991). As such, OC represents a positive and active social exchange relationship where employees are committed to organizational success. However, incivility can precipitate affective reactions which reduce willingness to exert effort on behalf of the leader. Furthermore, although research (Johnson, Chang, & Yang, 2010) reviewed by Meyer, Morin, and Vandenberghe (2015) suggests that supervisors and organizations can serve as “independent targets in identity formation and commitment through their unique relationships with subordinates” (p. 57), the two commitment targets are inherently interconnected as “supervisors enact organizational policy and promote organizational goals” (p. 57). Accordingly, supervisors should to some extent embody the organization to followers, who therefore blame the organization for supervisors’ uncivil behavior (Shoss, Eisenberger, Restubog, & Zagenczyk, 2013), resulting in less attachment or intention to maintain membership in the organization. In support of such arguments, Loi, Mao, and Ngo (2009) showed that followers’ relationship with the organization and in turn employee outcomes is to a large extent shaped by their relationship to the immediate supervisor. Hence, we hypothesize:

*Hypothesis 2: Incivility is negatively associated with organizational commitment.*

Andersson and Pearson (1999) state negative affect resulting from leader incivility can cause followers to be less attentive to organizational norms of conduct and less focused on the cost of various retaliatory actions. First, we argue that affective response to incivility may evoke retaliatory responses such as limiting personal effort and contribution to the organization. Several studies have found perceived injustice to be associated with negative behaviors such as retaliation (Skarlicki et al., 1999) and interpersonal deviance behaviors (Aquino et al., 1999). Second, social loafing is a withdrawal behavior involving a reduction in physical, perceptual, and cognitive effort, leaving

others to pick up the slack (Murphy, et al., 2003). Accordingly, followers subject to supervisory incivility should reciprocate negatively via decreased organizational commitment and social loafing (see Hu, Tetrick, & Shore, 2011). Similarly, Murphy, et al. (2003, p. 61) argue that “social exchange relationships individuals form in the workplace would mediate the relation between perceptions of interactional and distributive justice and social loafing.” In accordance, organizational commitment probably reflects the quality of employees’ social exchange relationship with their organization (e.g., Shore, Tetrick, Lynch, & Barksdale, 2006) and should therefore be regarded as a potentially important mediator of the relationship between incivility and social loafing. Social loafing is probably one way of the more important ways in which employees react to low-quality exchange relationships with their organization, as they may lack the motivation to exert full effort to benefit their organization. Conversely, individuals who are in a high quality social exchange relationship, and who are committed and care about the fate of the organization probably aim to reciprocate by not engaging in social loafing. As such, our theorizing aligns well with research reviewed by Liden, et al. (2004, p. 286) who conclude that “there is agreement that the fundamental origins of social loafing are motivational.” Hence, we developed:

*Hypothesis 3: Incivility is positively associated with social loafing via OC.*

## **Method**

### **Sample and procedure**

The sample was drawn from full-time employees in various industries such as the food distribution industry, wood production industry, the automotive industry, and the textile industry. We recruited the respondents through students who were currently enrolled in several executive education programs at our business school. As such, although our sample is a convenience sample, the employees within these industries are typically relatively similar in terms of demographics (e.g.,



they are typically male with a modest degree of education; Statistics Norway, 2018). Another benefit of choosing these particular industries is that they represent a for-profit business setting where profound change is taking place, and increased time pressure, information overload, and downsizing constitute a breeding-ground for competition and conflicts which may promote uncivil behavior among the employees (Vecchio, 1995). Respondents were notified of the study and its goals via e-mail one week in advance. A cover letter informed participants that the study was designed to collect data solely for research purposes, confidentiality was assured, and only aggregate data was to be used in the research. The participants included both leaders and their direct reports who were each given a unique link to the electronic questionnaire to be completed during working hours. No compensation was given to the respondents. To increase the response rate we had top managers endorse the research project, and we sent out two reminders to non-respondents with a one-week time lag. A total of 753 employees and 148 leaders completed the questionnaires. The leaders' and the followers' totals were predominantly male; 69.3% and 65.3% respectively, and the average age of the leaders and followers was 41.6 and 42.3 years, respectively. The average length of time each follower had worked with the same leader (dyad tenure) was 66.21 months, or five and a half years. Finally, the number of followers reporting to a particular leader (span of supervision) was on average 11.79 ( $SD = 9.03$ ).

### **Back translation and pilot test**

The original study questionnaires were developed in English. Although respondents were expected to have a good knowledge of English, the questionnaire was translated into Norwegian to avoid the risk of misunderstanding or misconception and to ensure equivalence of item meaning (Cavusgil & Das, 1997). Norwegian translation was employed by using a back-translation conversion process. Before the questionnaires were distributed to the respondents, a pilot test was

conducted using a focus group of five supervisors. They concluded that the instruments were relevant in a for-profit setting.

### **Instruments**

The present study measured leaders' perception of *the LMX relationship* (Scandura & Graen, 1984). The lead-in phrase was "Indicate the extent to which each statement describes this group member." Examples of sample items are: "This group member knows where he/she stands with me;" "I would defend and justify this group member's decisions if he/she were not present to do so;" anchors, 1 = Strongly disagree, 7 = Strongly agree. LMX provides an index of the leader's assessment of his/her working relationship with each follower. Each supervisor also provided ratings on their followers on a *Social loafing scale* of four items adapted from Kidwell and Robie (2003). The measure examined the extent to which an individual tended to do less than his or her share of work when other group members were available. Sample items: "This group member takes it easy if others are around to do the work;" "This group member gives less than 100 percent effort;" anchors: 1 = Very inaccurate, 7 = Very accurate. Items were generated through literature review and discussions with practitioners, culled by the authors, and tested in field study in multiple, diverse organizations (Kidwell & Robie, 2003). Furthermore, empirical evidence suggests that this particular scale displays convergent and criterion-related validity and is discriminantly distinct from related scales such as job neglect, free-riding, and tardiness (Kidwell & Robie, 2003).

Each follower completed the following two scales: *Workplace incivility* was measured with a three-item scale adopted from Cortina et al. (2001). Examples of sample items are: "Doubted your judgment on a matter over which you have responsibility;" "Paid little attention to a statement you made or showed little interest in your opinion." A 5-point frequency-based response scale was used, where: 1 = Never, 2 = Seldom, 3 = Occasionally, 4 = Often, and 5 = Always. *Organizational Commitment* was measured with the nine-item version of the *Organizational Commitment*

*Questionnaire* (Mowday, Steers, & Porter, 1979). Examples of sample items are: “I am willing to put in a great deal of effort beyond that normally expected in order to help the organization be successful;” “This organization really inspires the best in me in the way of job performance;” anchors: 1 = Strongly disagree, 2 = Disagree somewhat, 3 = Slightly disagree, 4 = Neither agree nor disagree, 5 = Slightly agree, 6 = Agree somewhat, 7 = Strongly agree.

*Control variables.* The present study controlled for factors that may influence either the independent or dependent variables of interest. We identified individual factors as potential correlates of the study variables based on a review of relevant literature. We applied follower gender (men coded “0” and women coded “1”), which could possibly provide alternative explanations for the relationships outlined in our hypotheses. Research has shown that men and women perceive disrespectful behavior differently, with females more likely to consider uncivil behavior more offensive (Montgomery et al., 2004). We also controlled for age, as ability to cope with incivility might increase with follower age (Cortina et al., 2001). Furthermore, the length of time the follower has worked with the same leader (dyad tenure) could influence the hypothesized relationships. Dyad tenure (measured in number of months), for example, may influence leader incivility, or followers’ social loafing and commitment to the organization. Finally, we applied span of supervision as control variable, as a larger span of supervision may promote the emergence of in-group and out-group structures.

## **Results**

### **Confirmatory factor analysis**

Preliminary analysis was conducted to test the measurement models for the included variables to determine whether the items reflected the construct they were intended to measure. We performed one confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) using the leader assessed data (LMX and social

loafing), and one CFA using the follower data (incivility, and OC). Both CFA's were conducted using cluster robust standard errors and the WLSMV estimator of MPlus. The results of the CFA for leader reported data revealed acceptable fit (Bollen, 1989):  $\chi^2 [13] = 117.03, p < 0.01$ ; RMSEA = 0.09; CFI = 0.99; NNFI/TLI = 0.98. The factor loadings ranged from .58 to .88 for LMX items, and .76 to .92 for social loafing items). The results of the CFA for follower reported data revealed similarly acceptable fit (Bollen, 1989):  $\chi^2 [103] = 337.613, p < 0.01$ ; RMSEA = 0.053; CFI = 0.98; NNFI/TLI = 0.98. The factor loadings ranged from .70 to .86 for incivility items, and from .49 to .94 for OC items.

### **Descriptive statistics**

Table 1 provides descriptive statistics and intercorrelations among the independent and the dependent variables. The composite reliability estimates for the multi-item scales are listed on the primary diagonal of the intercorrelation matrix. The composite reliability is comparable to Cronbach's alpha (Nunnally, 1978), but also accounts for the possibility that the items may have varying error variances and loadings (Bagozzi and Yi, 1988). They argue that the composite reliability estimate should be higher than .60. The reliability coefficients were in an acceptable range (from .73 to .93) for all the variables of interest. As expected, LMX was significantly correlated with incivility ( $r = -.15, p < .01$ ). Furthermore, incivility was correlated with social loafing, and OC ( $r_s = .22, -.29$ , respectively, both  $p < .01$ ).

-----  
 Insert about here Table 1  
 -----

### **Multilevel analyses**

Because our data is clustered (i.e. followers nested under leaders), we tested our hypotheses using multilevel analyses. Specifically, we used the linear mixed-effects models (MIXED) procedure in

SPSS. To determine the appropriateness of this procedure we estimated fully unconditional models (null models), and calculated the ICCs (intraclass correlation coefficients) for each dependent variable. The results indicated significant between-group variability in incivility (8%), social loafing (16%), and OC (14%). We present the results of the multilevel analyses in Tables 2, 3 and 4.

-----  
Insert about here Tables 2, 3, and 4  
-----

In accordance with Hypothesis 1, we found a negative relationship between LMX and incivility ( $\gamma = -.11, p < .01$ ), suggesting that more transactional LMX relationships are positively associated with leader incivility. Furthermore, in line with Hypothesis 2 we obtained support for a negative relationship between incivility and OC ( $\gamma = -.50, p < .001$ ). For Hypothesis 3 we predicted that incivility is positively associated with social loafing via OC. We used the Sobel test (1982) to formally test the indirect effects. Although typically applied to ordinary least squares regression, research supports the appropriateness of this procedure with respect to investigations of mediation in a multilevel modeling framework (Pituch, Whittaker, & Stapleton, 2005). Furthermore, as noted by Valrie, Gil, Redding-Lallinger, and Daeschner (2007), this procedure in a multilevel context has been shown to display suitable power and Type 1 error rates. As noted above, Path A (the relationship between incivility and OC) of both mediation models was negative and statistically significant. Similarly, Path B (the relationship between OC and social loafing) was negative and statistically significant ( $\gamma = -.11, p < .05$ ). In addition, the Sobel test indicated that OC ( $z = 1.96, p = .05$ ) was marginally a significant mediator of the relationship between incivility and social loafing. However, the Sobel test has been criticized for relying on the assumption of a normal sampling distribution (e.g., Preacher & Hayes, 2004). Accordingly, we also utilized the Monte

Carlo method of MacKinnon, Lockwood, and Williams (2004) to further investigate the significance of the indirect effect by constructing confidence intervals (a form of parametric bootstrapping). In support of Hypothesis 3, the 95% Monte Carlo confidence interval (.01, .11; Figure 2) suggested that OC mediates the influence of incivility on social loafing. We note that there were additional direct relationships between incivility and social loafing ( $\gamma = .60, p < .001$ ). Finally, to test the robustness of the results we performed an additional structural equation model (SEM). In this model, we included the direct relationships between the independent and dependent variables in addition to the indirect relationships. In accordance with the initial results, the results of this SEM ( $\chi^2 [305] = 1584.42, p < 0.01$ ; RMSEA = 0.08; CFI = 0.91; NNFI/TLI = 0.89) revealed a negative relationship between LMX and incivility ( $\gamma = -.59, p < .001$ ), between incivility and OC ( $\beta = -.36, p < .001$ ), but not between OC and social loafing ( $\beta = .02, n.s.$ ). With respect to the direct relationships, the results showed a nonsignificant relationship between LMX and OC ( $\gamma = -.03, n.s.$ ), and a significant relationship between incivility and social loafing ( $\beta = .53, p < .001$ ). Finally, the indirect relationship from LMX to OC was statistically significant (indirect effect = .21,  $p < .001$ ), although the direct relationship from incivility to social loafing did not reach statistical significance (indirect effect = -.01,  $n.s.$ ).

## Discussion

The present study aimed to extend the research on antecedents of incivility by examining how the relationship between leader and follower influences the display of incivility. In accordance with our expectations, we found supervisors with low-quality follower relationships to be more inclined to display incivility. A possible explanation for this observation is that followers who fail to meet performance and don't consider the good of the group cause supervisors frustration and disappointment, which then react with incivil behavior. Conversely, our findings suggest that followers with a high quality social exchange relationship with their supervisor are less likely to be

the targets of supervisor incivility. Although tentative, this may be because they, opposed to a follower in a low quality LMX relationship, is less likely to be motivated by "...the satisfaction of his/ her own self-interests, without consideration of the good of the group" (Graen & Uhl-Bien, p. 232). Besides, leaders who are in a high quality social exchange relationship with their followers probably aim to reciprocate by not engaging in incivil acts. A demoralizing consequence of the negative association between LMX and incivility, however, may be that low-performing followers do even more poorly by exercising strong negative resistance openly or covertly, and a destructive dynamic or vicious cycle ensues.

To our knowledge, the present study is the first to suggest and examine OC as an affective response to incivility. In line with our theoretical arguments we found that incivility was negatively associated with OC. As such, our finding supports Andersson and Pearson's theoretical framework (1999), which focuses on the interplay between uncivil behavior and negative affect. Specifically, incivility, as a breach of norms for mutual respect, seems to create negative feelings affecting OC. We believe this finding implies that supervisors to some extent embody the organization to followers, who in turn blame the organization for supervisors' uncivil behavior (Shoss, Eisenberger, Restubog, & Zagenczyk, 2013). Finally, the present study examines OC as a potential mediator of the relationship between leader incivility and counterproductive work behaviors. We argued that organizational commitment represents the quality of the social exchange relationship the followers have developed with their organization, and that when this social exchange relationship is of low quality, followers reciprocate negatively by lowering their contribution to the organization. Support was obtained for this contention, which suggests that incivility is negatively associated with social loafing via OC. This implies that followers, who seek revenge, limit their effort and contribution to the organization, by taking themselves off committees or work groups, working less overtime and reducing their efforts to encourage innovation, thus attempting to "harm their supervisor" (Pearson, Andersson, & Porath, 2000) and their organization. Over time, incivility is extremely costly to both

individuals and the organization (Porath, Gerbasi & Schorch, 2015). Our results seem also to be consistent with research conducted by Porath and Pearson (2010).

Interestingly, we observed a direct association between incivility and social loafing, as well as an indirect relationship between incivility and social loafing via OC, which may indicate two separate processes of supervisor incivility. The first process is consistent with Andersson and Pearson's framework (1999), which assumes that negative *affect* caused by leader incivility can motivate followers to retaliate against their supervisor and organization. This finding is also consistent with the affective events theory of Weiss and Cropanzano (1996), who state that those who are exposed to a negative workplace event, such as incivility, will not automatically engage in a rational assessment of the circumstances, but instead respond with negative emotional affect. This may progress to overwhelm the individual involved as manifested in employee outcomes such as social loafing. Second, the direct association between incivility and social loafing may indicate an additional *cognitive* process. Social exchange theory (Blau, 1964) sees the interactions (experienced supervisor incivility and follower behavioral response) as a relatively *rational* calculative process, where followers relate their experience to some standard of reward and punishment, and align their behavior accordingly, such as in our study where followers felt compelled to reciprocate negatively. Although speculative, the observed direct association may imply that followers' behavioral reactions, where they limit their personal effort and contribution to the firm, are based on rational objective judgments. Taken together, unveiling two separate processes of supervisor incivility may imply that the relationships between the cognitive, emotional and behavioral aspects of incivility are more complex than previously assumed. However, it should be noted that, in line with the more *rational* calculative process, the supplemental SEM failed to support a positive relationship between OC and social loafing. Accordingly, we encourage future research to explore these issues further.

### **Methodological limitations**



There are several limitations of this study which remain to be addressed in future work. First, only data from business settings was used, to eliminate alternative sources of error variance resulting from multiple contexts. Further study of public settings can test the validity and generalizability of our research model. A second limitation is that self-reporting by followers was used for all measures except social loafing and LMX. Self-reporting inherently contains the possibility of common method bias, although in our study the dependent variable, social loafing, was collected from a separate source (leaders) to reduce the threat of common method variance (Podsakoff et al., 2012). In addition, an exploratory factor analysis was conducted to see whether the self-reported measures loaded on a single factor, indicating an extreme amount of common-method bias. The three factors accounted for 64% of the total variance, and the largest factor only accounted for a small proportion of the variance (29%). Thus the results did not indicate a substantial degree of common method variance.

Although a strength of our study is that LMX and incivility were assessed by different sources, which should alleviate potential common method variance, research has shown a surprisingly low agreement between followers and leaders with regard to the quality of the LMX relationship (Matta, Scott, Koopman and Conlon, 2015). Accordingly, future research should assess LMX from not only the leaders point of view as was done in the present study, but also from the point of view of the followers. In this respect, it would also be interesting to see if the relationship between LMX and incivility differ depending on whether the quality of the leader-member relationship is assessed from the leader's or the follower's point of view. If the leaders' and followers' perceptions of LMX quality indeed differ, then theoretically, it is the leader's and not the follower' perception of the quality of LMX that should motivate leader incivility.

Finally, the present study has relied on a cross-sectional static measurement design, making it difficult to draw stronger causal inferences. Another third variable, for example poor follower performance, may initiate leader frustration resulting in uncivil behavior and/or low quality LMX,

and might just as well explain the effects found in our study. Still, in accordance with Andersson and Pearson's (1999) framework, out-group members are at increased risk of workplace incivility and spiraling retaliatory reactions. However, due to the cross-sectional nature of our studies, we cannot rule out the possibility of reverse causality. For instance, it may be that incivility decreases the quality of LMX rather than vice versa. Accordingly, longitudinal or experimental studies are needed in future research to identify the causal order and/or non-recursive causality between the variables investigated in the present study.

### **Implications for future research**

It is our hope that this study will encourage further research on antecedents and consequences of workplace incivility. An important next step is to replicate our findings with an independent sample to confirm the generalizability of the model to other samples and settings. Furthermore, Andersson and Pearson (1999) emphasize the importance of the *situation* in understanding how the process of exchange between parties unfolds, with instigators perhaps perceiving their own incivilities as legitimate or even moralistic. For example, out-group membership increased the risk of workplace incivility. Future research may identify other situations where negative behaviors escalate. Finally, we have attempted to model incivility – not as a single act in time – but as a *process* linked with social interaction, as outlined by Andersson and Pearson (1999). A further extension would be to examine the response of supervisors confronted with counter-productive work behavior (e.g. social loafing). Specifically, as outlined in Anderson and Pearson's (1999) framework, supervisors may cognitively interpret follower uncivil behavior as an interactional injustice deserving of retaliation. Examining supervisor responses would allow better understanding of how incivility escalates into a destructive coercive dynamic.

### **Practical Implications**

The results of the present study show that followers in low-quality LMX relationships are at increased risk of workplace supervisory incivility. To our knowledge, the research literature does not offer practical guidelines to address this situation. However, leadership training seminars could offer supervisors the opportunity to develop their understanding of how incivility impacts their relationship with followers and can fuel dysfunctional consequences which put the organization at risk. By increasing leader self-awareness and others' perception of their affective responses, we expect leaders can better adjust and control their leadership behavior to foster cohesion and respect in the organization.

It is also imperative that organizations evaluate their leaders to target areas for improvement, perhaps by collecting data from followers and any perception of supervisor incivility. Such feedback to leaders in a learning environment can provide the basis for further leadership style development. In this respect, evaluation, coaching and modeling can motivate leaders to become more conscientious and courteous to other members of the organization. A leadership training approach seems consistent with the proposal from Cortina (2008), who suggests an educational approach to prevent uncivil behavior at work: "Leaders set the tone for the entire organization, and employees look to them for cues about what constitutes acceptable conduct" (p. 62).

In addition, organizational rules of conduct can set clear guidelines and expectations for leaders, and become the foundation of leadership development. This would contribute to increased civility in the workplace and reduce supervisor-perpetrated incivility, particularly in an organizational climate characterized by rudeness, making workers miserable on the job, resulting in aggressive behavior, higher turnover, and lower productivity (Neuman & Baron, 1997).

Leadership development is challenging when individuals are characterized by uncivil and aggressive behavior. But by focusing on the benefits of proper conduct and strong relationships in meeting career objectives for these individuals, some progress can be achieved over a reasonable period of time. A constructive leadership development path is more beneficial than dealing with

harmful consequences, although identifying effective techniques for combating incivility in the workplace remains an important avenue for future research.

### References

- Adams, G. A., & Webster, J. R. (2013). Emotional regulation as a mediator between interpersonal mistreatment and distress. *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology, 22*(6), 697-710.
- Andersson, L. M., & Pearson, C. M. (1999). Tit for tat? The spiraling effect of incivility in the workplace. *Academy of Management Review, 24*(3), 452-471.
- Adams, G. A., & Webster, J. R. (2013). Emotional regulation as a mediator between interpersonal mistreatment and distress. *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology, 22*(6), 697-710.
- Aquino, K. (2000). Structural and individual determinants of workplace victimization: The effects of hierarchical status and conflict management style. *Journal of Management, 26*(2), 171-193.
- Aquino, K., Lewis, M. U., & Bradfield, M. (1999). Employee deviance: a proposed model. *Journal of Organizational Behavior, 20*(7), 1073-1091.
- Blau, P. M. (1960). A theory of social integration. *American journal of Sociology, 65*(6), 545-556.
- Bagozzi, R. P., & Yi, Y. (1988). On the Evaluation of Structural Equation Models. *Journal of Academy of Marketing Science, 16*(1).
- Beattie, L., & Griffin, B. (2014). Accounting for within-person differences in how people respond to daily incivility at work. *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology, 87*(3), 625-644.
- Bernerth, J. B., Armenakis, A. A., Feild, H. S., Giles, W. F., & Walker, H. J. (2007). Leader-member social exchange (LMSX): Development and validation of a scale. *Journal of Organizational Behavior, 28*(8), 979-1003. doi: 10.1002/Job.443

- Blau, P.M. (1964). *Exchange and power in social life*. Routledge.
- Blau, G., & Andersson, L. (2005). Testing a measure of instigated workplace incivility. *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology*, 78, 595–614.
- Bollen, K. A. (1989). *Structural equations with latent variables*. New York: Wiley.
- Buch, R., Thompson, G., & Kuvaas, B. (2016). Transactional Leader–Member Exchange Relationships and Followers’ Work Performance: The Moderating Role of Leaders’ Political Skill. *Journal of Leadership & Organizational Studies*, 23(4), 456-466.
- Bunk, J. A., & Magley, V. J. (2013). The role of appraisals and emotions in understanding experiences of workplace incivility. *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology*, 18(1), 87.
- Cavusgil, S.T., & Das, A. 1997. Methodological issues in empirical cross-cultural research: A survey of the management literature and a framework. *Management International Review*, 37, 71-96.
- Chidambaram, L., & Tung, L. L. (2005). Is out of sight, out of mind? An empirical study of social loafing in technology-supported groups. *Information Systems Research*, 16(2), 149-168.
- Cortina, L. M., Magley, V. J., Williams, J. H., & Langhout, R. D. (2001). Incivility in the workplace: incidence and impact. *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology*, 6(1), 64-80.
- Cortina, L. M. (2008). Unseen injustice: Incivility as modern discrimination in organizations. *Academy of Management Review*, 33(1), 55-75.
- Deluga, R. J. (1994). Supervisor trust building, leader member exchange and organizational citizenship behavior. *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology*, 67(4), 315-326.
- DiBattista, R. A. (1996). Forecasting sabotage events in the workplace. *Public Personnel Management*, 25(1), 41-52.

- Duffy, M. K., Ganster, D. C., & Pagon, M. (2002). Social undermining in the workplace. *Academy of Management Journal*, 45(2), 331-351.
- Einarsen, S. (2000). Harassment and bullying at work: A review of the Scandinavian approach. *Aggression and Violent Behavior*, 5(4), 379-401.
- Estes, B., & Wang, J. (2008). Workplace incivility: Impacts on individual and organizational performance. *Human Resource Development Review*, 7, 218–240.
- Furunes, T., Mykletun, R. J., Einarsen, S., & Glasø, L. (2015). Do low quality leader-member relationships matter for subordinates? Evidence from three samples on the validity of the Norwegian LMX scale. *Nordic Journal of Working Life Studies*, 5(2), 71-87.
- Giumetti, G. W., Hatfield, A. L., Scisco, J. L., Schroeder, A. N., Muth, E. R., & Kowalski, R. M. (2013). What a rude e-mail! Examining the differential effects of incivility versus support on mood, energy, engagement, and performance in an online context. *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology*, 18(3), 297.
- Graen, G. B., & Uhl-Bien, M. (1995). Relationship-based approach to leadership: Development of leader-member exchange (LMX) theory of leadership over 25 years: Applying a multi-level multi-domain perspective. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 6(2), 219-247.
- Hershcovis, M. S. (2011). Incivility, social undermining, bullying... oh my! A call to reconcile constructs within workplace aggression research. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 32(3), 499-519.
- Hu, X., Tetrick, L. E., & Shore, L. M. (2011). Understanding reciprocity in organizations: a US-China comparison. *Journal of Managerial Psychology*, 26(7), 528-548.
- Johnson, R. E., & Yang, L. Q. (2010). Commitment and motivation at work: The relevance of employee identity and regulatory focus. *Academy of Management Review*, 35(2), 226-245.
- Karau, S. J., & Williams, K. D. (1993). Social loafing: A meta-analytic review and theoretical integration. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 65(4), 681-706.

- Kidwell Jr, R. E., & Robie, C. (2003). Withholding effort in organizations: Toward development and validation of a measure. *Journal of Business and Psychology, 17*(4), 537- 561.
- Kuvaas, B., Buch, R., Dysvik, A., & Haerem, T. (2012). Economic and social leader–member exchange relationships and follower performance. *The Leadership Quarterly, 23*(5), 756-765.
- Lapierre, L. M., & Hackett, R. D. (2007). Trait conscientiousness, leader member exchange, job satisfaction and organizational citizenship behavior: A test of an integrative model. *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology, 80*(3), 539-554.
- Leymann, H. (1990). Mobbing and psychological terror at workplaces. *Violence and Victims, 5*(2), 119-126.
- Liden, R. C., Wayne, S. J., & Sparrowe, R. T. (2000). An examination of the mediating role of psychological empowerment on the relations between the job, interpersonal relationships, and work outcomes. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 85*(3), 407.
- Liden, R. C., Wayne, S. J., Jaworski, R. A., & Bennett, N. (2004). Social loafing: A field investigation. *Journal of Management, 30*(2), 285-304.
- Lim, S., & Cortina, L. M. (2005). Interpersonal mistreatment in the workplace: the interface and impact of general incivility and sexual harassment. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 90*(3), 483.
- Lim, S., & Lee, A. (2011). Work and non-work outcomes of workplace incivility: Does family support help? *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology, 16*(1), 95.
- Loi, R., Mao, Y., & Ngo, H. Y. (2009). Linking Leader Member Exchange and employee work outcomes: The mediating role of organizational social and economic exchange. *Management and Organization Review, 5*(3), 401-422.



- MacKinnon, D. P., Lockwood, C. M., & Williams, J. (2004). Confidence limits for the indirect effect: Distribution of the product and resampling methods. *Multivariate Behavioral Research, 39*, 99–128.
- Matta, F. K., Scott, B. A., Koopman, J., & Conlon, D. E. (2015). Does seeing “eye to eye” affect work engagement and organizational citizenship behavior? A role theory perspective on LMX agreement. *Academy of Management Journal, 58*(6), 1686-1708.
- Meyer, J. P. & Allen, N. J. (1991). A three-component conceptualization of organizational commitment. *Human Resource Management Review, 1*(1), 61-89.
- Meyer, J. P., Morin, A. J., & Vandenberghe, C. (2015). Dual commitment to organization and supervisor: A person-centered approach. *Journal of Vocational Behavior, 88*, 56-72.
- Meyer, L. L., & Spector, P. E. (2013). Reciprocal effects of work stressors and counterproductive work behavior: A five-wave longitudinal study. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 98*(3), 529.
- Montgomery, K., Kane, K., & Vance, C. M. (2004). Accounting for differences in norms of respect: a study of assessments of incivility through the lenses of race and gender. *Group & Organization Management, 29*(2), 248-268.
- Mowday, R. T., Steers, R. M., & Porter, L. W. (1979). The measurement of organizational commitment. *Journal of Vocational Behavior, 14*(2), 224-247.
- Nunnally, J. C. (1978). *Psychometric Theory*, 2nd ed., New York, NY: McGraw-Hill.
- Pearson, C. M., Andersson, L. M., & Porath, C. L. (2000). Assessing and attacking workplace incivility. *Organizational Dynamics, 29*(2), 123-137.
- Pearson, C. M., Andersson, L. M., & Wegner, J. W. (2001). When workers flout convention: A study of workplace incivility. *Human Relations, 54*(11), 1387-1419.
- Pearson, C. M., & Porath, C. L. (2005). On the nature, consequences and remedies of workplace incivility: No time for “nice”? Think again. *The Academy of Management Executive, 19*(1), 7-18.

- Penney, L. M., & Spector, P. E. (2005). Job stress, incivility, and counterproductive work behavior (CWB): The moderating role of negative affectivity. *Journal of Organizational Behavior, 26*(7), 777-796.
- Pituch, K. A., Whittaker, T. A., & Stapleton, L. M. (2005). A comparison of methods to test for mediation in multisite experiments. *Multivariate Behavioral Research, 40*(1), 1-23.
- Podsakoff, P. M., MacKenzie, S. B., & Podsakoff, N. P. (2012). Sources of method bias in social science research and recommendations on how to control it. *Annual Review of Psychology, 63*, 539-569.
- Porath, C. L., Gerbasi, A., & Schorch, S. L. (2015). The effects of civility on advice, leadership, and performance. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 100*(5), 1527.
- Porath, C. L., & Pearson, C. M. (2010). The cost of bad behavior. *Organizational Dynamics, 39*(1), 64-71.
- Porath, C. L., & Pearson, C. M. (2012). Emotional and behavioral responses to workplace incivility and the impact of hierarchical status. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology, 42*, 326–357.
- Preacher, K. J., & Hayes, A. F. (2004). SPSS and SAS procedures for estimating indirect effects in simple mediation models. *Behavior Research Methods, 36*(4), 717-731.
- Reio, T. G., & Ghosh, R. (2009). Antecedents and outcomes of workplace incivility: Implications for human resource development research and practice. *Human Resource Development Quarterly, 20*(3), 237-264.
- Scandura, T. A., & Graen, G. B. (1984). Moderating effects of initial leader–member exchange status on the effects of a leadership intervention. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 69*(3), 428.
- Schilpzand, P., De Pater, I. E., & Erez, A. (2016). Workplace incivility: A review of the literature and agenda for future research. *Journal of Organizational Behavior, 37*, 57– 88.
- Sears, K., & Humiston, G. S. (2015). The role of emotion in workplace incivility. *Journal of Managerial Psychology, 30*(4), 390-405.

- Shore, L. M., Tetrick, L. E., Lynch, P., & Barksdale, K. (2006). Social and economic exchange: Construct development and validation. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology, 36*(4), 837-867.
- Shore, L. M., Bommer, W. H., Rao, A. N., & Seo, J. (2009). Social and economic exchange in the employee-organization relationship: The moderating role of reciprocation wariness. *Journal of Managerial Psychology, 24*(8), 701-721.
- Shoss, M. K., Eisenberger, R., Restubog, S. L. D., & Zagenczyk, T. J. (2013). Blaming the organization for abusive supervision: The roles of perceived organizational support and supervisor's organizational embodiment. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 98*(1), 158.
- Sliter, K. A., Sliter, M. T., Withrow, S. A., & Jex, S. M. (2012). Employee adiposity and incivility: establishing a link and identifying demographic moderators and negative consequences. *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology, 17*(4), 409.
- Sobel, M. E. (1982). Asymptotic confidence intervals for indirect effects in structural equation models. *Sociological Methodology, 13*, 290-312.
- Sparrowe, R. T., & Liden, R. C. (1997). Process and structure in leader-member exchange. *Academy of Management Review, 22*(2), 522-552.
- Skarlicki, D. P., Folger, R., & Tesluk, P. (1999). Personality as a moderator in the relationship between fairness and retaliation. *Academy of Management Journal, 42*(1), 100-108.
- Statistics Norway (2018). Arbeidskraftundersøkelsen (Labour Force Survey). Retrieved from [https://www.bufdir.no/Statistikk\\_og\\_analyse/Kjonnsligestilling/Arbeidsliv\\_og\\_kjonn/Kjonn\\_sfordeling\\_sektorer/#heading21053](https://www.bufdir.no/Statistikk_og_analyse/Kjonnsligestilling/Arbeidsliv_og_kjonn/Kjonn_sfordeling_sektorer/#heading21053).
- Tepper, B. J. (2000). Consequences of abusive supervision. *Academy of Management Journal, 43*(2), 178-190.

- Valrie, C. R., Gil, K. M., Redding-Lallinger, R., & Daeschner, C. (2007). Brief report: daily mood as a mediator or moderator of the pain–sleep relationship in children with sickle cell disease. *Journal of Pediatric Psychology, 33*(3), 317-322.
- Vecchio, R. P. (1995). It's not easy being green: Jealousy and envy in the workplace. *Research in Personnel and Human Resources Management, 13*, 201-244
- Vecchio, R. P., & Brazil, D. M. (2007). Leadership and sex similarity: A comparison in a military setting. *Personnel Psychology, 60*(2), 303-335.
- Walumbwa, F., Cropanzano, R., & Goldman, B.M. (2011). How leader-member exchange influences effective work behaviors: Social exchange and internal-external efficacy perspectives. *Personnel Psychology, 64*(3), 739-770.
- Walsh, B. M., Magley, V. J., Reeves, D. W., Davies-Schriels, K. A., Marmet, M. D., & Gallus, J. A. (2012). Assessing workgroup norms for civility: The development of the Civility Norms Questionnaire-Brief. *Journal of Business and Psychology, 27*(4), 407-420.
- Weiss, H. M., & Cropanzano, R. (1996). Affective events theory: A theoretical discussion of the structure, causes and consequences of affective experiences at work. In B. M Staw & L. L. Cummings (Eds.), *Research in Organization Behavior, Vol 18*. (pp.1-74). Greenwich, CT: JAI Press
- Wilson, N. L., & Holmvall, C. M. (2013). The development and validation of the Incivility from Customers Scale. *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology, 18*(3), 310.
- Wingrove, J., & Bond, A. J. (1998). Angry reactions to failure on a cooperative computer game. *Aggressive Behaviour, 24*, 27-36.
- Wu, L. Z., Zhang, H., Chiu, R. K., Kwan, H. K., & He, X. (2014). Hostile attribution bias and negative reciprocity beliefs exacerbate incivility's effects on interpersonal deviance. *Journal of Business Ethics, 120*(2), 189-199.

- Yamada, D. C. (1999). Phenomenon of workplace bullying and the need for status-blind hostile work environment protection. *Georgetown Law Journal*, 88, 475-536.
- Zalesny, M.D., & Graen, G.B. (1987). Exchange theory in leadership research. In A. Kieser, G. Reber, & R. Wanderer (Eds.), *Handbook of Leadership* (pp. 714-727). Stuttgart, Germany: C.E. Paeschel, Verlag.

Table 1

*Means, standard deviations, reliabilities and intercorrelations*

	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Span of supervision	11.79	9.03								
2. Follower gender	.35	.48	-.02							
3. Follower age	41.59	10.60	-.13**	-.05						
4. Dyad tenure	66.21	75.70	-.26**	-.10**	.24**					
5. LMX	5.06	.85	-.12**	.07	-.06	.15**	(.80)			
6. Incivility	1.54	.53	.05	.00	-.01	.06	-.15**	(.90)		
7. Social loafing	2.43	1.40	.15**	-.11**	.04	-.06	-.56**	.22**	(.92)	
8. OC	5.44	1.08	-.06	.01	.09*	.06	.15**	-.29**	-.13**	(.93)

*Note.*  $n = 148$  (leaders),  $n = 753$  (followers). Composite reliability estimates on primary diagonal; \*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ .

Table 2

*Multilevel analysis predicting incivility*

	Incivility
Intercept	1.53***
Span of supervision	.00
Follower gender	.03
Follower age	-.00
Dyad tenure	.00
LMX	-.11***
Model deviance $\chi^2$	1065.90

*Note.*  $n = 148$  (leaders),  $n = 753$  (followers).

\*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ . \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

Table 3

*Multilevel analysis predicting OC*

	OC
Intercept	5.42***
Span of supervision	-.00
Follower gender	.10
Follower age	.01
Dyad tenure	.00
Incivility	-.50***
Model deviance $\chi^2$	2074.28

*Note.*  $n = 148$  (leaders),  $n = 753$  (followers).

\*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ . \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .



Table 4

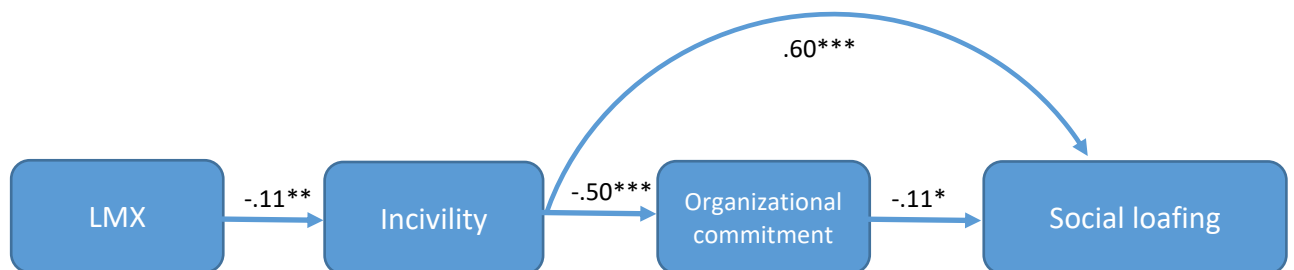
*Multilevel analysis predicting social loafing*

	Social loafing
Intercept	2.48***
Span of supervision	.00
Follower gender	-.25*
Follower age	.01
Dyad tenure	-.00
Incivility	.60***
OC	-.11*
Model deviance $\chi^2$	2074.28

*Note.*  $n = 148$  (leaders),  $n = 753$  (followers).

\*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ . \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

Figure 1: Results of multilevel analyses



*Note.*  $n = 148$  (leaders),  $n = 753$  (followers). To simplify the graphical presentation, the additional paths from the control variables are not displayed.

Figure 2: Monte Carlo Confidence Interval for the indirect relationship between incivility and social loafing

