



COMPETITIVE WORK ENVIRONMENT AND COUNTERPRODUCTIVE WORK BEHAVIOR IN UNIVERSITY TEACHERS: MEDIATING ROLE OF WORKPLACE FEAR OF MISSING OUT

Aanum Iqbal¹, Fatima Javed^{1*} & Muhammad Nasar Iqbal¹

¹Lahore School of Behavioural Sciences, The University of Lahore, Pakistan

Article Info

*Corresponding Author

Email Id: fatimajaved192@ymail.com

Abstract

This study aimed to examine the mediating role fear of missing out (FoMO) between the correlation between a competitiveness work environment and counterproductive work behavior in the university teachers. The sample was recruited by using a convenient sampling technique from the different private universities of Lahore. A total of 260 participants (n=140 females, n=120 males) were included in the sample and three three standardized questionnaires were employed, among which the Competitive Work Environment Scale (Fletcher & Nusbaum, 2010), the Workplace Fear of Missing out Scale (Budnick *et al.*, 2019), and the Counterproductive Work Behavior Scale (Koopmans, 2014). Findings revealed that workplace FoMO and workplace competitive work environment significantly positively correlated with the counterproductive work behavior. Furthermore, workplace FoMO partially mediate the relationship between competitive work environment and counterproductive work behavior. These findings indicates the importance of determining the extent to which workplace FoMO seems to apply within the academic context since such information will be important in the determination of the effective approaches that may be used to reduce counterproductive tendencies among the university teaching staff.

Keywords

Competitive Work Environment; Counterproductive Work Behavior; Workplace Fear of Missing out; University Teachers.



1. Introduction

The pattern of the workplace environments has changed considerably in the last years, especially in academic institutions (Iqbal *et al.*, 2025; Bess *et al.*, 2023). The culture of work in the universities, particularly in the institutions of the private sector, has grown to be more competitive with greater attention to performance indicators, rates of publications, student reviews, grant wins, and university ranking (Haleem *et al.*, 2023). On the one hand, a certain degree of competition can increase motivation and drive employees, but, on the other hand, too much competitiveness and competitiveness poorly managed can turn into negative consequences such as stress, burnout, and counterproductive work behavior (CWB) in university teachers (Iqbal *et al.*, 2023). Competitive Work Environment (CWE) stands as a psychological climate where employees feel that the organizational rewards depend on the comparison of the outputs of employees and their peers (Murtaza & Rasheed, 2023). Following up on this idea, Fletcher and Nusbaum (2010), Jones *et al.* (2017), and Ng (2017) invoked the perceptions of employees working in competitive workplaces guided by both the peer comparison and organizational behavioral mechanisms: rewards, recognition, and prestige. The definitions imply that CWE is highly determined by internal recognition and appreciation which can be used as a motivational factor to increased employee performance. According to the Theory of Cooperation and Competition (Deutsch, 2012), there is a possibility of curious people with a competitive nature to view things as a zero-sum game where an increase in power or status of a person may come as a cost to others. In such environments, competitive individuals may engage in counterproductive behaviors aimed at personal advantage. For instance, Bavik (2015) found that individuals in highly competitive settings are more likely to engage in

counterproductive knowledge behavior, such as intentionally withholding or limiting the sharing of knowledge to gain a competitive edge. Widyastuti and Hidayat (2018) stated that counter-productive work behavior includes complaining, wasting and misusing resources and time, engaging in conflicts with colleagues, endangering the organization through certain actions, deviant, destructive and dangerous behavior, abuse of various substances and poor quality of work. This dimension is unfavorable to the well-being of employees and organization. Keller *et al.* (2016) emphasized that a competitive climate in the workplace can lead to workaholism, particularly when contextual and individual factors interact. Similarly, a study by Loch *et al.* (2000) found that merit-based status competition can motivate group members to exert greater effort; however, the same study also revealed that overall group performance may decline if status is obtained through political manipulation rather than merit. Pryzbylski *et al.*, (2013) constructed Fear of Missing Out (FoMO) as an overwhelming fear that others are enjoying rewarding experience in places one misses. In the very beginning, FoMO was mostly associated with overusing social media, which frequently led to addiction, stress, and poor well-being. More recently, the concept has been applied into the workplace, introducing the phenomenon of Workplace FoMO that is yet to undergo a considerable amount of exploration. According to Budnick *et al.* (2019), Workplace Fear of Missing Out is characterized as feelings of having a general sense that one may be missing worthwhile career opportunities when at work or not connected to work as compared to other employees. This type of FoMO is associated with the fear of not getting an important chance in the workplace, including being a part of an important decision-making process, networking professionally,

getting assigned to a new project, or getting access to important information. It can be described as a psychological stress which could push workforce to stay always connected, and it could be at the cost of the welfare and work-life balance (Wynen *et al.*, 2021). In a broad sense, counterproductive work behaviors (CWBs) refer to any voluntary behaviors among employees that may have the effect of infringing upon legitimate interests of an organization, or to its stakeholders as a whole, and bringing about harm to the latter (Sackett & DeVore, 2001). Spector *et al.* (2006) provide the broad definition of workplace violence which covers an aspect of very specific behaviors, such as theft, substance abuse, sabotage, interpersonal violence and absenteeism. It is also intersected with a number of related constructs, namely; workplace retaliation, aggression and workplace incivility. According to Fletcher *et al.* (2008), competitive psychological climate is positively related with stress and indirectly to self-rating performance about performance on a task, meaning that competitiveness at work is both positive as well as negative in terms of motivation and effects based on individuals experience and management of competitiveness. The reason that the mediating role of workplace FoMO is investigated is connected with the possibility to explain why people can commit counterproductive behaviors in highly competitive work environments. In this type of environment workers can become really anxious not to lose out on good opportunities, information or identification that can boost their career status. It makes them work productively or even unfavorably like by holding information back, over-committing themselves to a task, or backstabbing other workers in an effort to stay in the spotlight and remain competitive. This psychological mechanism can be a useful explanation of future understanding to the behavioral implication of workplace competition and approach to building healthier work

environments that are more cooperative. The study attempted to confer the mediating role played by the Workplace Fear of Missing Out between Competitive Work Environment and Counterproductive Work Behavior amongst University Teachers.

1.1 Objectives

To find out the correlation among competitive work environment, workplace fear of missing out and counterproductive work behavior in university teachers.

To identify the mediating role of fear of missing between competitive work environment and counterproductive work behavior in university teachers.

1.2. Hypothesis

- There would likely to be a positive correlation among competitive work environment, workplace fear of missing out and counterproductive work behavior in university teachers.
- Fear of missing would likely to mediate the relationship between competitive work environment and counterproductive work behavior in university teachers.

2. Methods

2.1 Participants and Procedure

The total sample comprised 260 participants, including 120 males and 140 females. A convenient sampling technique was employed to recruit lecturers working on a permanent basis in private sector universities of Lahore. Ethical approval for the study was obtained from the Departmental Ethical Review Committee. Permission for the use of research instruments was granted by the respective authors. Additionally, a formal letter of data collection was requested from the Head of the Department to facilitate smooth coordination and avoid any inconvenience during the process. Written informed consent was obtained from all participants, who were assured that the information provided would be used solely for research purposes. The

participants also had to know that they had the freedom to withdraw themselves at any given time without any implications.

2.2. Measures

The present study used three standard scales to obtain data of university teachers to investigate the relationship between competitive work environment and workplace fear of missing out (FoMO) and work performance. Description of each scale follows.

2.2.1. Competitive Work Environment Scale (CWES)

The Competitive Work Environment Scale (CWES), designed by Fletcher and Nusbaum (2010) is conducted with 20 items divided into five separate dimensions such as competition involving tangible rewards, competition involving intangible rewards, competition involving recognition, competition involving status and competition guided by coworkers. The sum in the total score is a person perception about the competitive environment of his or her job. The scale will adopt 7-point likert scale of response with answers as strongly disagree to strongly agree. This is evident in the fact that in the study, the CWES showed superb internal consistency, having a Cronbachs alpha level of .94.

3. Results

Descriptive Statistics of the Sample

Table 1: Descriptive Analyses of Demographic Variables (N=260)

Variables	Male	Females	Mean	Standard Deviation
Gender	120	140		
Age Range (26-30)			28.20	1.58
Work Experience(1Year -5Years)			2.50	1.29

The descriptive analyses of the demographic variables employed in the study (N = 100) are highlighted in Table 1. Gender bifurcation shows 120 and 140 males and female participants respectively. The age range of the participants was 26-30 (M=28.20, SD=1.58) and work experience was from 1 – 5 years (M= 2.50, SD= 1.29).

2.2.2. Workplace Fear of Missing Out (FoMO) Scale

It was created by Budnick *et al.* (2019) and contains 10 items aimed to measure anxiety among the employees regarding missing some information, opportunities, or social contacts related to work. The questionnaire applies the 5-point likert response format with the answers ranging between strongly disagree and strongly agree. The scale in the present study showed high reliability with the alpha coefficient parameter of .93.

2.2.3. Counterproductive Work Behavior Scale

As part of sub-scales of the Individual Work Performance Questionnaire (IW PQ) developed by Koopmans *et al.*, Counterproductive Work Behavior (CWB) was also used in the present study. The subscale takes the form of 5 items on a 5-point Likert scale whose answers vary between, never and, always, and the scale is aimed at measuring behaviours that harm performance at work. In the present study, CWB subscale proved to have a good internal consistency, Cronbachs alpha = .83.

2.2.4. Demographics Information

Demographics information including age, gender, and work experience, was also collected from the participants.

3.2. Correlation Analysis

Table 2: Pearson Correlation, Mean and Standard Deviation of Competitive Work Environment, Workplace Fear of Missing Out, and Counter-Productive Work Behavior (N=260)

Variables	M	SD	CWE	WFOMO	CWB
CWE	91.75	20.13	-	.25**	.35***
WFOMO	28.16	9.74	-	-	.32***
CWB	9.00	4.51	-	-	-

Note. *M* = Mean, *SD* = Standard Deviation, *CWE* = Competitive Work Environment, *WFOMO* = Workplace Fear of Missing Out, *CWB* = Counter-Productive Work Behavior, *** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$

Table 2 illustrates Pearson correlation among competitive work environment, workplace fear of missing out, and counterproductive work behavior in university teachers. The findings indicate significant positive correlation between competitive work environment and workplace fear of missing out and counterproductive work behavior.

3.3. Mediation Analysis

Table 3: Regression analysis for Mediation of Workplace Fear of Missing Out between Competitive Work Environment and Counterproductive Work Behavior (N=260)

Variable	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	β	R^2	ΔR^2
Step I				.12	
CWEB	.08	.01	.35***		
Step II				.18	.06
CWEB	.07	.01	.29***		
WFOMO	.12	.03	.26***		

Note. *CWE* = Competitive Work Environment, *WFOMO* = Workplace Fear of Missing Out, *CWB* = Counter-Productive Work Behavior, β =Beta, *** $p < .001$, *B* = unstandardized Coefficient of Beta, *SE* = Standard Error, R^2 = coefficient of determination, ΔR^2 = Delta R square.

The table illustrates the mediating effect of workplace fear of missing out (FoMO) on the relationship between a competitive work environment and counterproductive work behavior among university teachers. In Step I, the R^2 value of .12 indicates that a competitive work environment explains 12% of the variance in counterproductive work behavior, $F(1, 259) = 35.94$, $p < .001$. These findings suggest that a competitive work environment significantly and positively predicts counterproductive work behavior. In Step II, the R^2 value increased to .18, indicating that the inclusion of workplace FoMO along with a competitive work

environment explains 18% of the variance in counterproductive work behavior, $F(2, 257) = 29.26$, $p < .001$. The change in R^2 ($\Delta R^2 = .06$) reveals a 6% increase in explained variance from Model 1 to Model 2. Furthermore, the regression coefficient for the competitive work environment decreased from $\beta = .35$ in Model 1 to $\beta = .29$ in Model 2, though it remained statistically significant. This reduction in the effect size, coupled with the significance of FoMO in the model, supports the conclusion that workplace fear of missing out partially mediates the relationship between a competitive work environment and counterproductive work behavior.

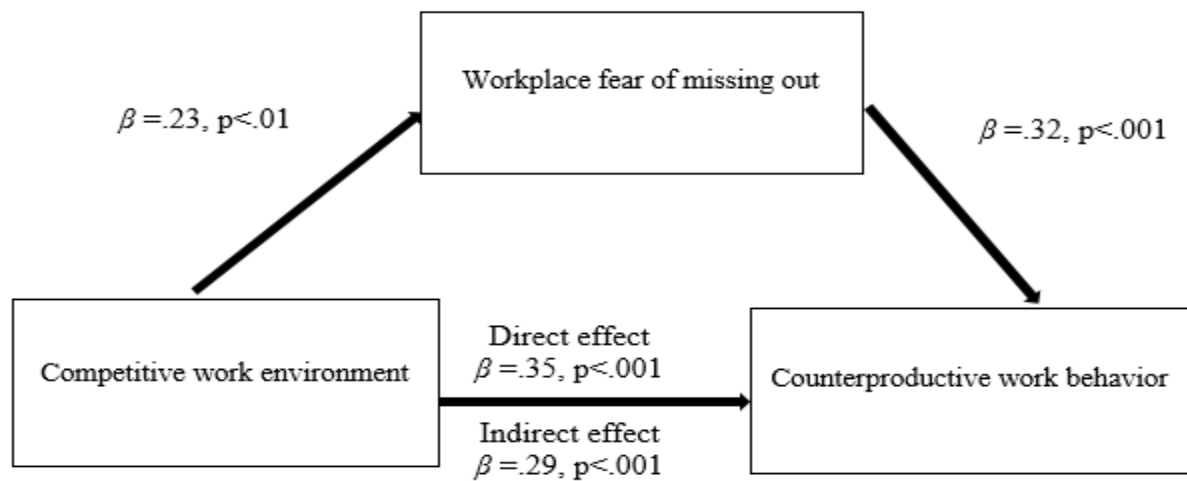


Figure 1: Workplace Fear of Missing Out as the Mediator in the Relationship between Competitive Work Environment and Counterproductive Work Behavior in University Teachers

4. Discussion

With growing attention toward the phenomenon of Fear of Missing Out (FoMO), the present study aimed to examine the role of workplace FoMO in the relationship between a competitive work environment and counterproductive work behavior among university teachers. The findings indicated that a competitive work environment was significantly and positively correlated with counterproductive work behavior among university teachers. These results are inconsistent with some previous literature (Jones *et al.*, 2015; Enns & Rotundo, 2012), which suggested that competition may lead to negative outcomes. In the present study, competition among employees, driven by coworkers and motivated by the desire for rewards, recognition, and status appears to contribute to harmful workplace behaviors. University teachers operating in such environments may exhibit behaviors such as complaining about schedules, making excuses for workload, misusing time and resources, engaging in interpersonal conflicts or political manipulation, showing a lack of responsibility, handling tasks carelessly, losing focus on deadlines and institutional goals, and neglecting their personal and professional

growth. These results indicate the possible harmful effect of the uncontrolled competition in the academic institutions. More so, the results revealed that work-related Fear of missing out had a significant positive correlation with counterproductive work behavior of the university teachers. Such connection can be harmful to both the welfare of the employees and the operations within the organization. These results are to some extent contrary to the previous studies. In their study, Fridchay and Reizer (2022) discovered that personal differences in FoMO were linked to job performance decreased, and the effect between them was mediated via burnout. In a similar manner, Zahoor *et al.* (2019) described that the occurrence of job insecurity enhances the chances of counterproductivity at the work place. Through all of these studies, the culminating conclusion is that FoMO increases one in anxiety, which could, consequently, cause poor work practices and low output. The recent evidence confirms the fact that in competitive academic structures, FoMO might enhance stress and result in self-destructive habits within individuals and institutions. The analysis of the mediation accomplishments indicated that the fear of missing out in the place of work partially mediated the

relationship between the competitive working environment and counterproductive working behavior. The notion of Workplace FoMO is quite recent and very little has been done in terms of exploration in its relevance to organizational environment. Nevertheless, studies in the past have facilitated FoMO as a mediating variable in other contexts, such as between well-being and social media activity (Przybylski *et al.*, 2013), motivational variables and social media usage (Alt, 2015), or personality types and cyber loafing (Ozcan & Umut, 2023). The present research highlights this body of knowledge further by shedding light that Workplace FoMO is also a mediating factor in the relationship between a competitive work atmosphere and counterproductive work outcomes at professional levels. The results imply that heightened competition in the organization is capable of instigating psychological stressful factors like FoMO that eventually has a potential to cause detrimental workplace conduct. This coincides with the theory of cooperation and competition brought forward by Deutsch (2012), which assumes the position that a person with a competitive outlook believes that they can improve their status by taking up the equivalent of other people, which can create poor relationships and behavioural consequences in the competitive setting.

5. Conclusion

The research points at the prominent work-related fear of missing out (FoMO). It shows that competitive working environment and FoMO in the workplace are some of the elements that spur counterproductive work behavior among university faculty. This is an indication that aggressiveness and fear of missing relevant meetings, decision, or avenues of creating an influential network may impact badly on the productivity of employees, especially in the capacity of providing quality education to young adult learners. FoMO at work is a new concept in the field of organizations and deserves more attention. Its

implications and mechanisms in different situations of organizations should further be investigated in future.

6. Limitations of the Study

The study will be restricted to the private sector universities within the Lahore city. This geographical constraint is a prospect which can be picked up in future research examining these variables in different realms i.e., at provincial level or comparison of these major cities. A larger sample study will strengthen the validity of the generalization of the results and will create a better understanding of the relations between workplace relations and the fear of missing out in various institutional and cultural contexts.

7. Implications and further direction of the study

The current research highlights the position of Workplace Fear of Missing Out (FoMO) and its contribution to organizational behavior. The research results can be used to help the university administration to develop a healthy competition and increase the productivity of the employees. Due to the lack of effective management to curb the negative effects of counterproductive work behaviour in the competitive context, companies are advised to consider managing workplace FoMO situation through fostering work cultures that enhance positive interactions. This can involve giving constructive regular feedbacks, acknowledging the efforts of the employee, creating a community spirit among the employees and having room to grow professionally. In addition, it is possible to conduct further work on this topic and include administrative personnel in the university area of analysis, whose activity is very important in terms of institutional operation. Gender and institutional sectors (i.e., public vs. private) comparative analysis could also provide helpful information on how workplace FoMO is manifested among different worker groups.

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