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Effect of Ethical Leadership on Workplace Cyberbullying Exposure and Organizational Commitment

Worakamol Tiamboonprasert[1] and Peerayuth Charoensukmongkol[2]

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Cyberbullying is a significant and prevalent problem in Thai society. Although research about cyberbullying has been conducted among teenagers and employees at private organizations, there remains a research gap regarding the issue of cyberbullying in educational institutions, particularly the antecedents and outcomes associated with it. The present study investigates the effect of ethical leadership on employees' exposure to workplace cyberbullying at one public university in Thailand. Theoretically, the role of ethical leadership is based on the emotion reaction model. Survey data were collected from 358 employees using stratified sampling. The results from Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling support the effect of ethical leadership on cyberbullying exposure (β= -.20, $p < 0.01$), as well as the effect of cyberbullying exposure on organizational commitment (β= -.25, $p < 0.01$). Additionally, the scope of usage for the computer-mediated communication (CMC) platform significantly moderates the effects of ethical leadership on cyberbullying exposure (β = -.14, $p < 0.01$) as well as the effect of cyberbullying exposure on organizational commitment (β = -.16, $p < 0.01$). This research has two implications. Firstly, it is crucial to understand that cyberbullying can happen easily when employees use various CMC platforms in the university. Secondly, although it is inevitable to regulate employees' use of CMC, the role of the supervisor's ethical leadership plays a vital role in creating the supportive and ethical climate in the work units to prevent the chance that someone will utilize technology for cyberbullying other employees.

Keywords: cyberbullying, computer-mediated communication, organizational behavior, university, work motivation

Cyberbullying is a topic in behavioral sciences research and a societal problem that has received scholarly attention from academics in many western countries (Coyne et al., 2017; Farley et al., 2016; Sittichai & Smith, 2018; Vranjes et al., 2017). It is a type of bullying that occurs through various electronic channels such as social media platforms, instant messaging, and email (Farley et al., 2016). Cyberbullying generally involves harmful behaviors that individuals commit in cyberspace such as harassment, spreading rumors, impersonation, trickery, and isolation (Einarsen et al., 2009). Cyberbullying not only prevails among children and teenagers in schools, but it also happens to working adults in professional environments.

Given that information technology and electronic devices, such as desktop computers, laptop computers, and smartphones are regularly and frequently used in the workplace, it can create the opportunity to exploit these technologies to bully others. Exposure to workplace cyberbullying is a critical problem as it can cause detrimental consequences to individuals and

[1] Doctoral Candidate, International College, National Institute of Development Administration, Bangkok, Thailand. Email: kj.worakamol@gmail.com
[2] Associate Professor, International College, National Institute of Development Administration, Bangkok, Thailand

organizations (Nielsen & Einarsen, 2012). Cyberbullying in the workplace can potentially cause mental and physical health problems for employees, such as anxiety, stress, and emotional exhaustion (Farley et al., 2016; Jönsson et al., 2017). Further, it correlates with lower job satisfaction, less organizational commitment, and higher turnover intent (Jönsson et al., 2017; Lim & Teo, 2009; Muhonen et al., 2017).

Although the issue of workplace cyberbullying has been studied extensively in behavioral sciences and organizational research, there are several gaps worthy of exploration. Despite the evidence supporting the impact of cyberbullying in various occupational contexts, there is a limited amount of research conducted on workplace cyberbullying among working adults in educational settings. Previous studies have shown that employees working at educational institutions (e.g., academics, educators, and administrators) are among the groups that could be exposed to cyberbullying (Blizard, 2016; Faucher et al., 2014; Kopecký & Szotkowski, 2017). However, most studies about cyberbullying at educational institutions have been primarily conducted in Western countries such as in the United States, the United Kingdom, and Canada (Blizard, 2016; Cassidy et al., 2014; Coyne et al., 2017, respectively). For example, Blizard (2016) found that cyberbullying experienced by faculty members affected their physical and emotional wellbeing. Cassidy et al. (2014) showed that faculty members at a Canadian university had experienced cyberbullying either by students or by colleagues. Coyne et al. (2017) found that faculty members in the UK who exposed to cyberbullying tended to display a strong dissatisfaction toward their job. However, there is no evidence about the impact of cyberbullying that happens to employees who work in educational institutions in Thailand. Thailand also provides an excellent context for studying workplace cyberbullying because it is among the countries reporting the highest rates of cyberbullying (Sittichai & Smith, 2018). Generally, studies of cyberbullying in Thailand have targeted children and teenagers in schools (Auemaneekul et al., 2019; Samoh et al., 2019). Despite prior evidence showing that cyberbullying normally happens in Thai society (Charoenwanit, 2019), there is no research in Thailand regarding the antecedents of cyberbullying that happens to employees at educational institutions.

The purpose of this study is to examine the effect that workplace cyberbullying has on employees in an educational institution, using the case of one public university in Thailand. This research explores the antecedents of workplace cyberbullying in terms of supervisors' leadership characteristics that might explain the degree of cyberbullying that employees experience in the workplace. Fundamentally, Festl and Quandt (2017, p. 1) contend that "research on cyberbullying is interdisciplinary by nature, embracing as it does approaches that are primarily rooted in psychology, pedagogics, and communication studies." Therefore, the novelty of the present study lies in its interdisciplinary nature in integrating the knowledge from leadership and human–computer interactions to add on to the psychological aspect of workplace cyberbullying. First, this study integrates the knowledge from leadership discipline to propose the antecedent of workplace cyberbullying. Prior research has shown that leadership plays a vital role in preventing the occurrence of cyberbullying in the workplace (Gardner et al., 2016; Vranjes et al., 2017). In particular, this research focuses on the role of the ethical leadership of supervisors. This research aims to examine whether a supervisor's ethical leadership could determine the chance of workplace cyberbullying that employees experience at the university. Regarding the outcome associated with cyberbullying, this research examines the possible impact on the organizational commitment of employees. Lastly, this research integrates the knowledge from the human–computer interactions discipline to explores whether the effect of ethical leadership on cyberbullying exposure, as well as the subsequent effect of cyberbullying

exposure on organizational commitment, could be moderated by the scope of computer-mediated communication (CMC) that employees regularly gain access to. To date, no research has investigated the interaction of CMC platform usage with the psychological perspective of workplace cyberbullying. Given that cyberbullying frequently occurs via CMC due to the often anonymous nature of this communication platform (Gardner et al., 2016), it is necessary to explore whether employees who gain access to many CMC platforms might suffer more from increased exposure to cyberbullying when compared to those who gain access to only a few CMC platforms, and whether the impact of ethical leadership on cyberbullying exposure is the same between these two groups of employees.

We expect that the results from this research should provide additional evidence to prior research that remains unclear about the antecedence and consequence of workplace cyberbullying in Thai education institutions. Moreover, this research can add new knowledge to prior research regarding some conditional factors in terms of the scope of CMC platform access that might moderate the impacts of cyberbullying. Lastly, the results from this research should provide some insight for the management of education institutions about some cause and consequence of cyberbullying, as well as a policy recommendation to prevent cyberbullying problem that may happen in the institutions.

Literature Review

Workplace Cyberbullying

Branch et al. (2013) describe workplace cyberbullying as the adverse treatment conducted repeatedly by a perpetrator (e.g., supervisor, colleague, or subordinate) via electronic devices and communication. It happens when the perpetrator exploits the CMC, such as email or social media to transmit the intention to bully, harass, mistreat, and provide negative behaviors toward a victim who is also an employee in an organization (Kowalski et al., 2018). Farley et al. (2016) suggest that workplace cyberbullying is a work-related aggressive behavior that appears repeatedly and overtime by an individual or a group to harass, threaten or create a negative impact by using the electronic method. Although workplace cyberbullying is similar to traditional bullying in the workplace, it can be more harmful than traditional bullying (Campbell, 2005). In particular, Gardner et al. (2016) propose that three unique characteristics make cyberbullying happen more easily and have more significant harm than traditional bullying. These characteristics include (1) anonymous interaction, (2) nonverbal communication cues, and (3) boundarylessness. Firstly, the person who commits cyberbullying can remain unknown; it is difficult to identify the person who involves in online harassment (Gardner et al., 2016). Secondly, bullying in cyberspace involves non-verbal cues; without immediate feedback from a victim, the perpetrator is less likely to show empathy toward a victim (Kowalski et al., 2018). Thirdly, the impacts of cyberbullying can be extended outside the workplace; the viral of cyberbullying can be transmitted to third parties such as friends, family, or the public domain outside the organization (D'Cruz & Noronha, 2013). Given the serious consequences that are caused by workplace cyberbullying, the organization must understand some antecedents and outcomes of workplace cyberbullying to develop a preventive policy to reduce the problem in the workplace. In particular, this research focuses on ethical leadership as the antecedent and organizational commitment as the outcome of workplace cyberbullying. The characteristics and associations of each as it relates to workplace cyberbullying will be discussed in the following sections.

Ethical Leadership

Over the past decade, the concept of ethical leadership has received growing attention from scholars in leadership research. Brown et al. (2005) summarized ethical leadership in terms of serving as a role model for the followers as well as maintaining the ability to influence the ethical behaviors of one's followers. Ethical leadership reflects two roles, a moral person and a moral manger (Byun et al., 2018). First, a *moral person* reflects the personal roles of leaders that involve ethical conduct; this role relates to individual characteristics such as honesty, integrity, fairness, trustworthiness, altruism, and awareness (Byun et al., 2018). As moral persons, leaders not only behave and make decisions based on ethical values (Brown & Treviño, 2006), they also serve as role models to emphasize the appropriate behaviors of their followers (Brown et al., 2005). Second, as a *moral manager*, ethical leaders act as the manager who promotes ethical values in the organization (Brown & Treviño, 2006; Brown et al., 2005). Ethical leaders who take the role of a moral manager not only exercises authority based on ethical practices, responsibility and accountability for the best interest of subordinates, customers and organization (Byun et al., 2018), but they also demonstrate clear communication to the followers, offer rewards for ethical behaviors, and punish the followers who engage in unethical behaviors (Brown & Treviño, 2006). In research, ethical leadership links to many positive outcomes, such as employees' well-being, job satisfaction, and commitment (Brown & Treviño, 2006; Charoensukmongkol et al., 2016; Stouten et al., 2010).

Organizational Commitment

Organizational commitment refers to employees' psychological bonds to their organization, which can reduce the tendency to leave the organization (Allen & Meyer, 1990). It can also be defined as "an emotional attachment to, identification with, and involvement in the organization" (Allen & Meyer, 1990, p. 1). According to this definition, organizational commitment involves employees' sense of enjoyment as members of the organization, their sense of belongingness to it, and their willingness to put more effort into working for the organization (Allen & Meyer, 1990). Organizational commitment has been reported to increase favorable outcomes such as job performance (Riketta, 2002) and job satisfaction (Charoensukmongkol, 2014; Vandenberg & Lance, 1992), Moreover, employees who exhibit a high degree of organizational commitment tend to demonstrate high readiness for organizational change (Al-Hussami et al., 2018) and tend to express more organizational citizenship behaviors (Dalal, 2005).

Theory and Hypotheses

This research utilizes the emotion reaction model (ERM), by Vranjes et al. (2017), as a theoretical framework to explain the hypotheses related to the role of ethical leadership in preventing cyberbullying in the workplace. The ERM has been frequently used in research to explain the occurrence of workplace bullying. According to Vranjes et al. (2018, p. 381), "the model was grounded in the interdisciplinary literature regarding traditional workplace bullying, adolescent cyberbullying, and computer-mediated communication." For example, Vranjes et al. (2018) integrate the variables from organizational behavior and psychology such as leadership characteristics, work characteristics, and personal characteristics of individuals in their ERM conceptual framework to explain cyberbullying. According to Vranjes et al. (2017), the ERM consists of the following three factors: (1) workplace stressors, (2) emotional reactions, and (3) cyberbullying engagement. First, workplace stressors are generally indicated

as a cause of workplace cyberbullying (Vranjes et al., 2017). Vranjes et al. (2017) posit that workplace stressors can be job-related (e.g., role overload, role ambiguity, role conflict), team-related factors (e.g., ineffective leadership, team conflict), and organizational factors (such as organizational climate and organizational politics). Second, emotional reaction refers to negative feelings (e.g., anger, fear) trigged by workplace stressors. Negative emotion caused by work-related stressors creates a sense of vulnerability to cyberbullying in the workplace (Balducci et al., 2012). These negative emotions consequently lead to workplace cyberbullying engagement, which is the last component in the ERM (Vranjes et al., 2017). Moreover, cyberbullying is subsequently theoriorized to have negative impacts on behaviors of individuals (Vranjes et al., 2018). For example, Vranjes et al. (2018) content that it can impair social and role functioning of individuals, and lead to withdrawal behaviors.

Overall, the ERM theoretically implies that, to prevent cyberbullying, it is important to address workplace stressors. From this theoretical ground, the supervisor's ethical leadership is proposed as the antecedent that can lower workplace stressors that lead to cyberbullying. In particular, Vranjes et al. (2017) suggest that leadership is classified as part of psychosocial work environment which is a precursor of cyberbullying in the ERM. For this reason, the ethical leadership of a supervisor is considered as a relevant antecedent of cyberbullying according to this theoretical framework. The role of ethical leadership will be discussed in the following section.

Effect of Ethical leadership on Workplace Cyberbullying

The ERM theoretical framework can explain why the supervisor's ethical leadership plays a crucial role in reducing the occurrence of workplace cyberbullying. From leadership theory, leaders play an influential role in creating a positive organizational climate that promotes employees' morale and psychological well-being (Phungsoonthorn & Charoensukmongkol, 2019). The role of leadership, according to the ERM framework, is to lower workplace stressors that are antecedents of workplace cyberbullying. Previous studies have reported that supervisors' ethical leadership relates positively to various aspects of favorable employees' attitudes and behaviors, well-being, prosocial behaviors, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment (Brown & Treviño, 2006; Charoensukmongkol et al., 2016). In particular, ethical leadership has been linked to a lower unfavorable environment at work, which leads to misconduct behaviors and workplace deviance behaviors. An ethical leader plays a crucial role in setting the ethical standard in the organization (Brown et al., 2005).

Previous research has shown that ethical leaders tend to promote ethical attitudes of followers, such as moral reasoning and prosocial motivation (Brown et al., 2005; Stouten et al., 2010). Employees working under supervisors who exhibit ethical leadership characteristics are likely to refrain from engaging in unethical behaviors such as being offensive, abusive, teasing, and excluding others (Walsh et al., 2018). Further, previous evidence has suggested that ethical leaders tend to promote fairness of reward distribution, which is essential for inhibiting workplace bullying (Stouten et al., 2010). Some studies have supported the negative linkage between ethical leadership and workplace bullying behaviors (Ahmad, 2018; Stouten et al., 2010). Therefore, employees who work under the supervision of ethical leaders should be less likely to experience stressors and aggression in the workplace, thereby lowering the chance of workplace cyberbullying exposure. We propose the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1: Ethical leadership relates negatively to employees' exposure to workplace cyberbullying.

Effect of Workplace Cyberbullying on Organizational Commitment

The effects of workplace cyberbullying can have detrimental effects on individuals and organizations (Nielsen & Einarsen, 2012). Research generally shows that cyberbullying adversely affects employees' health-related outcomes (Muhonen et al., 2017). In terms of work-related effects, cyberbullying can lead to job dissatisfaction (Coyne et al., 2017). Additionally, employees cyber-bullied in the workplace tend to develop negative attitudes and behaviors toward the organization (Kowalski et al., 2018). They become less involved in their organization, thereby leading to high turnover intent (Jönsson et al., 2017; Lim & Teo, 2009; Muhonen et al., 2017). Cyberbullying experienced by employees can potentially lower their organizational commitment. This argument is supported by prior studies showing that unfavorable work climate (Chen et al., 2017) and interpersonal conflict among employees in the workplace (Loes & Tobin, 2018) are major antecedents that lead to lower organizational commitment. Given that cyberbullying in the workplace creates unfavorable atmosphere and toxic work relationship among employees (Coyne et al., 2017), it is likely for employees who expose to cyberbullying in a workplace to feel less committed to the organization. In particular, the negative influence of cyberbullying on organizational commitment has been supported in prior studies (Lim & Teo, 2009; Nielsen & Einarsen, 2012; Jönsson et al., 2017; Muhonen et al., 2017). Based on the discussion and some empirical evidence, employees exposed to workplace cyberbullying should be less likely to demonstrate organizational commitment. Therefore, we hypothesize the following:

Hypothesis 2: Employee exposure to cyberbullying relates negatively to employee organizational commitment.

Moderating Effect of the Scope of CMC Platform Usage

Lastly, this study explores whether the scope of CMC platforms that employees typically use could moderate the effect of ethical leadership on cyberbullying exposure, as well as the subsequent effect of cyberbullying exposure on organizational commitment. The scope of CMC platform is integrated as the moderator because the ERM proposed by Vranjes et al. (2018) consider computer-mediated communication as part of the interdisciplinary perspective to explain cyberbullying. Generally, CMC is a channel that facilitates cyberbullying due to the anonymity of communication in CMC (Gardner et al., 2016). In particular, as more employees gain access to numerous CMC platforms, the chance that they will be exposed to cyberbullying and its adverse effects increases. Conversely, employees without access to CMC or who have limited access to CMC platforms tend to have lower chances of exposure to cyberbullying content. Given this rationale, it can be expected that the negative impact that workplace cyberbullying causes to organizational commitment should be lower for employees who do not use or use a few CMC platforms. In this case, the effect of ethical leadership on workplace cyberbullying exposure might be less relevant for this group of employees as well. However, for employees who use numerous CMC platforms, the role of ethical leadership in preventing

cyberbullying should be more relevant for them, given the higher chance of exposure to cyberbullying content via CMC. Therefore, we propose the final two hypotheses as follows:

Hypothesis 3: The scope of CMC platform usage moderates the negative effect of ethical leadership on employee exposure to workplace cyberbullying.

Hypothesis 4: The scope of CMC platform usage moderates the negative effect of employee exposure to cyberbullying on organizational commitment.

Methodology

Target Population, Sampling Method, and Data Collection Procedure

The target population of this research included employees of one medium-sized public university in Thailand. The university has two main campuses located in urban and rural areas. It is one of the leading universities in Thailand, with more than 25,000 students and approximately 3,000 academic and 2,700 non-academic staff. The university comprises 21 academic colleges. Additionally, the university has adopted CMC in the work process. Given the evidence in prior research showing that the use of CMC in the organization can create a high chance for workplace cyberbullying (Vranjes et al., 2018), adopting CMC at the university may present the opportunity for cyberbullying to occur.

Data were collected from 2,439 full-time academics (i.e., lecturers and researchers) and non-academics (i.e., administrators and administrative support staff) who have worked for the university at least six months. This study utilized stratified sampling, which is a type of probability sampling that allows all sub-groups within the population to be selected. Using this sampling method ensures that employees from all faculties and departments are included in the data collection. First, employees at the university were classified into different strata in terms of colleges and departments and then invited to participate in the study.

Before distributing the questionnaire, permission to collect data at the university was granted by the university president. The research also received ethical approval from the ethical committees of the National Institute of Development Administration (ECNIDA 2020/0032). Next, the researcher informed the contacted person of each faculty and department to arrange the time for a questionnaire distribution to their employees. The questionnaires were distributed to each faculty and department at their office buildings. The questionnaire has seven pages consisting of seven parts; it took approximately 15 to 20 minutes to complete. The cover letter, which explained the research objectives, and a return envelope were attached to the questionnaire. The purpose of the research ethics procedure was to protect the privacy and security of the participants, who voluntarily took part in the study. Participants could skip answering any question that made them feel uncomfortable. They could also withdraw at any time for any reason. However, to encourage survey response, the researcher promised to give 10 Baht donation to a charity organization for each returned survey. The participants were given three days to complete the questionnaires. Data collection had started in March of the year 2020 and took one week to complete. After the end of the data collection period, the researcher received 358 usable questionnaires for data collection, which accounted for a 14.68 percent response rate. Demographic characteristics of the sample are shown in Table 1.

Table 1
Characteristics of the Sample

Characteristics	Descriptive Statistics
Gender	Female: 245 (68.4%) Male: 113 (31.6%)
Age	Mean: 39.41 *S.D.*: 8.17
Job tenure	Mean: 10.62 *S.D.*: 7.55
Job type	Non-academic: 148 (41.3%) Academic: 210 (58.7%)
Scope of CMC platform usage	Do not use CMC: 7(2.0%) Use one platform of CMC: 46: (12.8%) Use two platforms of CMC: 99: (27.7%) Use three platforms of CMC: 116 (32.4%) Use four platforms of CMC: 56 (15.6%) Use five platforms of CMC: 17 (4.7%) Use six platforms of CMC: 17 (4.7%)

Measures

Exposure to cyberbullying is measured by a short version of the Cyberbullying Behavior Questionnaire (CBQ) developed by Jönsson et al. (2017). The CBQ consists of 20 items and asks how frequently individuals experienced aspects of cyberbullying over the last six months. The scale comprises 5-point Likert-type scales ranging from 1 (*never*), 2 (*sometimes*), 3 (*monthly*), 4 (*weekly*), and 5 (*daily*). Sample items are "*False statements about you have been spread on the Internet.*" and "*Gossip or rumors about you have been spread on the Internet.*" The quality of the internal consistency of the scale is satisfactory (α=.951).

Ethical leadership is measured by the Ethical Leadership Scale (ELS) developed by Brown et al. (2005). The scale comprises ten items rated on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). Sample items are "*Conducts his/her personal life in an ethical manner*" and "*Sets an example of how to do things the right way in terms of ethics.*" The quality of the internal consistency of the scale is satisfactory (α=.977).

Organizational commitment is measured by using the scale developed by Allen and Meyer (1990). The scale provides six items rated on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). Sample items are "*I really feel as if this organization's problems are my own.*" And "*This organization has a great deal of personal meaning for me.*" The quality of the internal consistency of the scale is satisfactory (α=.781).

The scope of CMC platform usage is measured by the number(s) of the CMC platform that employees usually used. The respondents were asked to select the CMC platform(s) that they normally use, including LINE, Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, and email. Respondents could choose more than one choice. The score of this variable was coded according to how

many CMC platforms that the respondents selected. For example, if the respondent selected LINE, Facebook, and Email, this variable was coded 3. If the respondent only selected email, we coded this variable as 1.

The original scale questions in English were translated to Thai by the author. Then, these Thai questions were re-translated to English by an English teacher who is Thai. The re-translated version in English was compared with the original English version; no difference in meaning was found.

Control Variables

The set of control variables that could affect workplace cyberbullying exposure and organizational commitment are included in the analysis. In particular, this study controls for gender (male/female), age (in years), job tenure (in years), job type (academic/non-academic), and the scope of the CMC platform usage.

Estimation Method

This study used Partial Least Square Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) to analyze the data. PLS-SEM integrates essential statistical functions, such as multiple regression analysis, path analysis, and SEM analysis, which are essential for analyzing a model that involves latent variables. This research used WarpPLS version 6.0 to perform PLS-SEM estimation.

Results

Measurement model estimations ensured that the latent variables had strong psychometric properties. First, the convergent validity was examined by using factor loadings, which must be higher than .5. The results indicated that the factor loadings of all constructs except for one question of workplace cyberbullying exposure were greater than .5. The issue of workplace cyberbullying exposure that had a factor loading less than .5 was then removed, making the level of all latent variables satisfactory. Second, discriminant validity was tested. The square root of Average Variance Extracted (AVE) of each construct must be higher than other correlations involving that particular construct. The results reported in Table 2 indicate that this criterion was met. Third, the reliability of the latent variables was measured using Cronbach's alpha coefficient, which must be higher than .7. The results were already reported in the measures section. The scale reliability of all latent variables was satisfactory. Finally, the test of multicollinearity was performed using the full variance inflation factor (VIF) statistics. Full VIF must be lower than 3.3. The analysis showed that the maximum full VIF in the model is 2.694; this confirmed that multicollinearity was not a serious concern in the model.

Hypothesis 1 stated that ethical leadership relates negatively to employees' workplace cyberbullying exposure. The result confirms the negative relationship between ethical leadership and workplace cyberbullying exposure (β=-.20; p<.01). The result is also statistically significant. Thus, hypothesis 1 is supported. Hypothesis 2 stated that cyberbullying exposure of employees would reduce employees' organizational commitment. The result confirms the negative relationship between workplace cyberbullying exposure and organizational commitment (β= -.25; p<.01). The result is also statistically significant. Thus, hypothesis 2 is supported. Hypothesis 3 stated that the scope of CMC platform usage would moderate the

negative effect of ethical leadership on employees' exposure to workplace cyberbullying. The moderating impact was estimated by the beta coefficient of the interaction between ethical leadership and the scope of CMC platform usage. The result shows that the beta coefficient of the interaction term is negative and is statistically significant (β=-.14; p<.01). This finding can be interpreted that the negative impact of ethical leadership on workplace cyberbullying exposure could be much lower for those with a broader scope of CMC platform usage. Thus, Hypothesis 3 is supported. Hypothesis 4 stated that the scope of CMC platform usage would moderate the negative effect of employees' exposure to workplace cyberbullying on organizational commitment. The moderating effect was estimated by the beta coefficient of the interaction between workplace cyberbullying exposure and the scope of CMC platform usage. The result shows that the beta coefficient of the interaction term is negative and is statistically significant (β=-.16; p<.01). This finding can be interpreted that the negative impact of workplace cyberbullying exposure on organizational commitment could be much lower for those with a broader scope of CMC platform usage. Thus, Hypothesis 4 is supported.

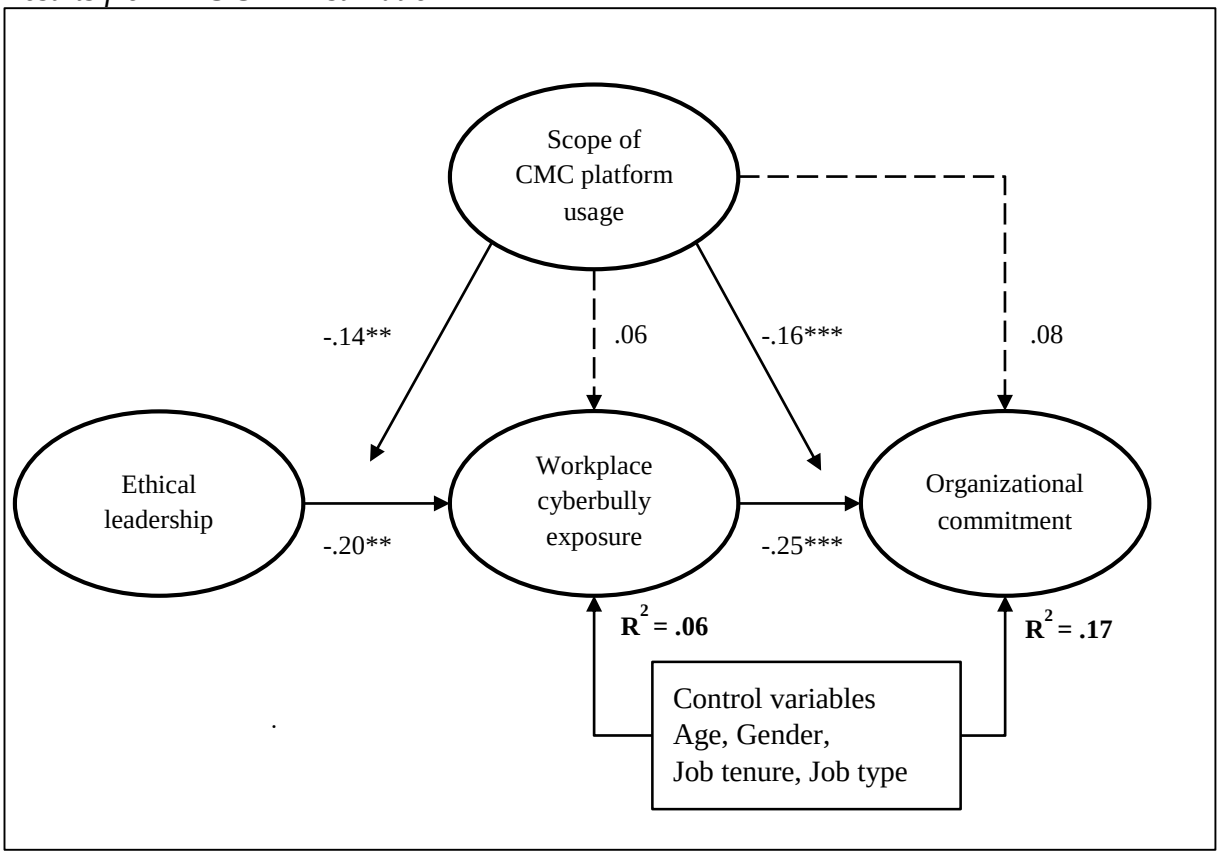
Table 2
Correlation, Descriptive Statistics, and the Square Root of AVEs

Variables	Means	S.D.	WCB	EL	OC	GEN	AGE	JTEN	JTYPE	CMC
WCB	1.34	.7	(.74)	-.14**	-.21**	-.01	.073	.08	.07	.02
EL	3.72	1.04		(.91)	.51**	.02	.041	.01	.18**	.14**
OC	3.6	.99			(.69)	.053	.238**	.22**	.15**	.08
GEN	.7	.46				(1)	.042	.07	-.13*	-.04
AGE	39.41	8.17					(1)	.76**	.22**	-.13*
JTEN	10.62	7.55						(1)	.03	-.12*
JTYPE	.4	.49							(1)	.021
CMC	2.8	1.31								(1)

Notes. * *p*-value < .05, ** *p*-value < .01; The square root values of Average Variance Extracted are displayed in the parentheses. CB=workplace cyberbullying exposure, EL=ethical leadership, OC=organizational commitment, GEN=gender (male=1; female=0), AGE=age, JTEN=job tenure, JTYPE=job type (academic=1; non-academic=0), CMC=scope of computer-mediated communication platform usage.

The moderating effects of the scope of the CMC platform usage appear in Figure 2. The line graphs were constructed according to the procedures suggested by Aiken and West (1991) using standardized values. For example, the line graph that represents the relationship between ethical leadership and workplace cyberbullying exposure moderated by the scope of CMC platform usage was constructed by plotting ethical leadership scores one standard deviation above the mean and one standard deviation below the mean across the high scope of the CMC usage (+1.00 SD) and low scope of CMC platform usage (−1.00 SD). The dashed lines represent the broader scope of the CMC platform usage, whereas the solid lines represent the narrow scope of CMC usage. The negative effect of ethical leadership on workplace cyberbullying exposure only presents for employees who use broader scope of CMC platform usage; for those with a narrower scope of CMC usage, ethical leadership does not affect workplace cyberbullying exposure. For the negative effect of workplace cyberbullying exposure on organizational commitment, it is apparent that employees with a broader scope of CMC platform usage tend to show a significantly lower rate of organizational commitment than those with a narrower scope of CMC platform usage. Overall, these illustrations support the moderating effect of the scope of CMC platform usage mentioned in the hypotheses.

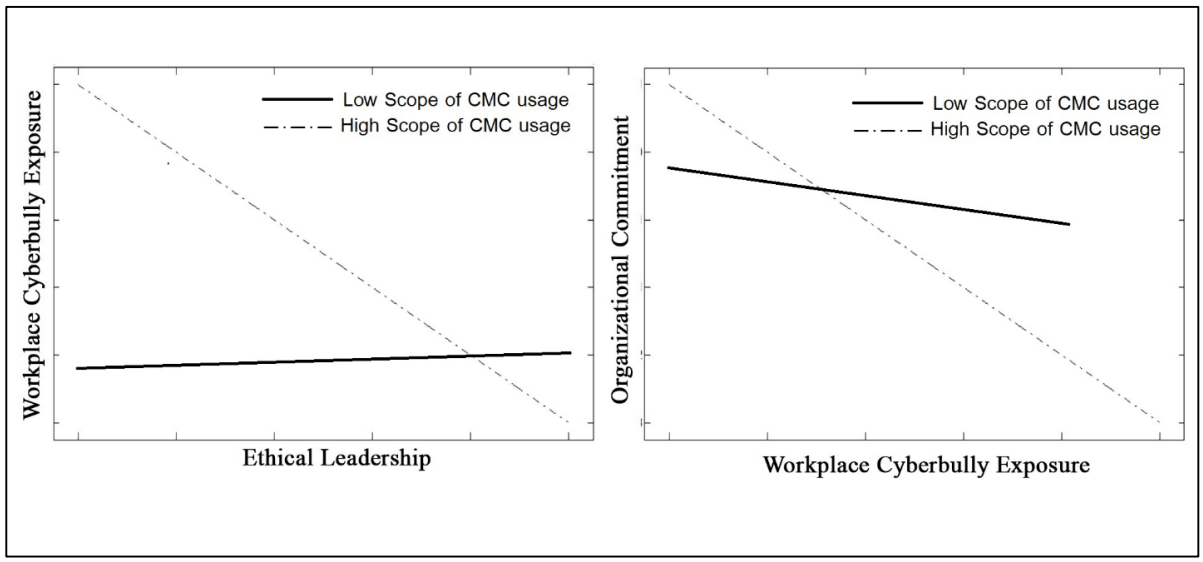
Figure 1
Results from PLS-SEM Estimation



Note. $p < .05$, *** $p < .01$; Standardized coefficients are reported

Regarding the effect of control variables, none of the control variables relates significantly to workplace cyberbullying exposure. For organizational commitment, only job tenure (β=.16; p=.02) and job type (β=.15; p<.01) relates positively and significantly to this variable.

Figure 2
Moderating Effect of The Scope of CMC Platform Usage



Discussion and Conclusion

This research explores the antecedent (ethical leadership) and outcome (organizational commitment) hypothesized to associate with employees' exposure to workplace cyberbullying at one public university in Thailand. The results from PLS-SEM estimation indicate that employees who work under the supervisor who exhibits a high degree of ethical leadership characteristics have less exposure to cyberbullying in the workplace. Conversely, another interpretation is that employees exposed to workplace cyberbullying seem to be those who work under the supervisor who exhibits lower ethical leadership. This result is consistent with prior research findings that leadership tends to play an influential role in determining the chance of workplace cyberbullying that happens in the organization (Brown et al., 2005; Stouten et al., 2010; Walsh et al., 2018). From the theoretical perspective, the result regarding the effect of ethical leadership on workplace cyberbullying exposure provides evidence to support the ERM of Vranjes et al. (2017).

The role of ethical leadership, according to ERM, is to promote the ethical and supportive work climate to lower workplace stressors that are antecedents of workplace cyberbullying. Moreover, this role of ethical leadership is consistent with leadership theory, which suggests that leaders have a strong influence in creating a favorable climate in the organization that promotes employees' work morale and ethical behaviors (Phungsoonthorn & Charoensukmongkol, 2018). Consistent with prior studies, this finding also supports the effect of ethical leadership on lower counterproductive behaviors and bully in the workplace (Stouten et al., 2010). Regarding the outcome associated with workplace cyberbullying, the results indicate that employees exposed to workplace cyberbullying tend to demonstrate significantly lower organizational commitment. This result is consistent with the results from prior research regarding the effect of workplace cyberbullying that leads to various adverse job outcomes (Coyne et al., 2017; Kowalski et al., 2018; Muhonen et al., 2017). In particular, it supports that cyberbullying lowers employees' organizational commitment in other types of organizations (Jönsson et al., 2017; Lim & Teo, 2009; Muhonen et al., 2017; Nielsen & Einarsen, 2012).

Moreover, the analysis of the moderating effect using the scope of CMC platform usage as the moderator unveils interesting evidence. The results indicate that the degree to which ethical leadership negatively related to employees' exposure to workplace cyberbullying only presents for the group of employees who use a broader scope of the CMC platform. As more employees access various types of CMC platforms, the effect that ethical leadership has on lowering employee exposure to workplace cyberbullying strengthens. For the group of employees that have access to limited CMC platforms, a supervisor's ethical leadership does not influence employees' exposure to workplace cyberbullying. Similarly, for the effect of workplace cyberbullying exposure on organizational commitment, the group of employees who uses more CMC platforms tends to show a significantly higher impact on organizational commitment than the group of employees who uses limited CMC platforms. In particular, these results are consistent with the core argument in cyberbullying literature, which suggests that access to CMC creates greater opportunities for cyberbullying to happen (Farley et al., 2016). In this case, the more CMC platforms that are accessed by employees, the more chance they could be susceptible to workplace cyberbullying. Therefore, the role of ethical leadership seems to be more prominent in the prevention of cyberbullying only when a variety of CMC platforms are used by employees in the organization.

Research Contributions

Overall, this study contributes to prior research in the area of workplace cyberbullying in two ways. First, the evidence regarding the antecedent and outcomes of cyberbullying using the sample of university employees in Thailand confirms the problem of cyberbullying in educational institutions. More importantly, this study contributes to the body of knowledge in cyberbullying research by showing that the scope of CMC platform usage of employees plays an influential role in enhancing the effect of ethical leadership on workplace cyberbullying exposure, as well as instigating the effect of workplace cyberbullying exposure on organizational commitment. The results contribute new knowledge by showing that the degree to which employees are affected by workplace cyberbullying and the consequence that follows could somehow depend on some conditional factors. The results clarify that when employees do not actively use CMC, they may not be affected much by cyberbullying, and the role of leadership in dealing with the cyberbullying problem may not be as essential. However, the preventive role of leadership seems to be particularly important when employees access broader CMC platforms. Lastly, this study also contributes to knowledge in behavioral science. From the theoretical perspective, the use of ERM framework adds more understanding how ethical behaviors of a supervisor could influence cyberbullying behaviors of employees and their subsequent behavioral outcome in terms of organizational commitment. This study clarifies that research on workplace cyberbullying from the behavioral science perspective needs to consider the impact of leadership behavior on cyberbullying behaviors of employees.

Recommendation for Future Research

Given that the results from this research are limited to just one public university, it will be essential for future researchers to test the model in other educational settings to confirm whether the results from this research could be generalized to different contexts. Moreover, given that research in the area of workplace cyberbullying still lacks evidence regarding the conditional factors that can limit or enhance the effect of cyberbullying on outcome variables, it will be necessary for future researchers to explore other moderating factors that might influence the impact of cyberbullying. For example, future researchers may integrate some personal characteristics of employees and organizational aspects as the moderators to test the possibility that they may influence the effect of cyberbullying.

Recommendations for Management

This research yields several recommendations for university management regarding the effects that cyberbullying may cause to employees, as well as policy recommendations to prevent cyberbullying in the institution. Firstly, it is crucial to understand that cyberbullying can happen easily when employees use various CMC platforms in the university. Although the university cannot monitor employees' use of CMC, the role of the supervisor's ethical leadership plays a vital role in creating the supportive and ethical climate in the work units to prevent the chance that someone will utilize the technology to cyberbullying other employees. Given that cyberbullying can be harmful to employee commitment toward the institution, the management of the university must promote ethical behaviors of supervisors to prevent the occurrence of cyberbullying and the effect that may follow.

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